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New Statesman

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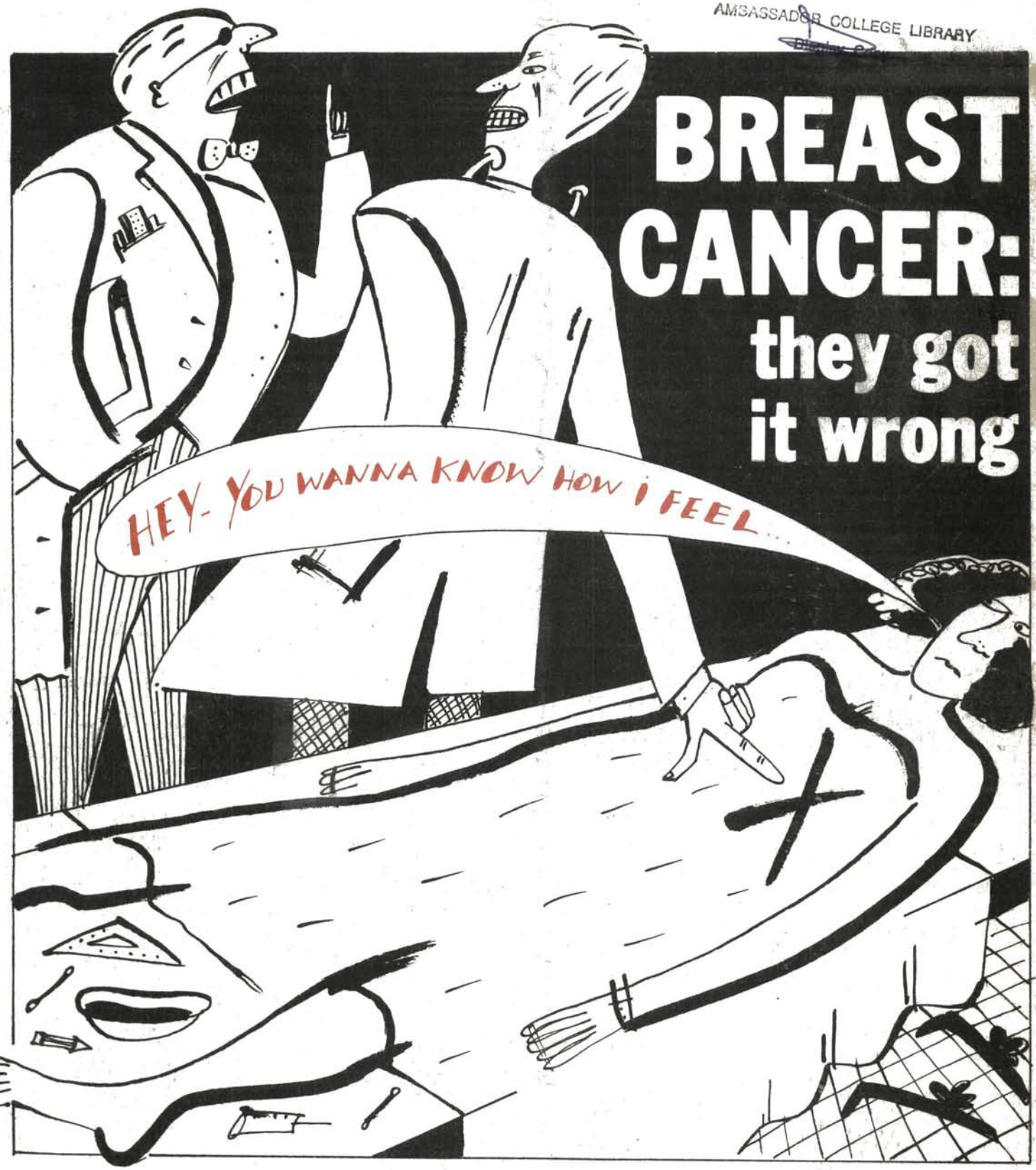

BREAST CANCER: they got it wrong

PLUS: Greenham's revolting ratepayers; Charter 77; Mondale's mate; Luis Palau;

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New Statesman

Vol 108 No 2783 20 July 1984

Maggie's latest banana skin

IT HAS BEEN a famous victory by the GCHQ unions over Mrs Thatcher this week. It was not a victory that they were particularly expecting at this stage of the legal process, which made it all the more pleasurable. For there was not much faith on the union side that British courts would uphold as a fundamental right of a citizen the right to belong to a trade union. They assumed that they would first have to exhaust the processes of the British legal system — Court of Appeal, even the House of Lords if necessary — before taking the issue to the European Court of Human Rights, which has consistently shown a greater concern for the civil rights of the individual than either British Parliaments or British courts.

They will even now probably have to make the journey to Europe anyway, for the government has made it clear that it will pursue its appeal against Mr Justice Glidewell's surprise judgment right to the House of Lords. And in any case the judge, it must be remembered, did not find that there *was* a right of employees at GCHQ to belong to a union. He said indeed that the government was within its 'rights'. He found for the unions only on the important, but much more narrow ground that in removing the right to belong to a union the government had acted in breach of natural justice by not consulting properly in advance. He was in no doubt that the government had the *power* to do what it did to its employees at GCHQ. It fell foul of the law only because it exercised that power in an *arbitrary* way.

The Prime Minister's office has now let it be known that, if the government loses all its appeals, the Prime Minister will accept that the original act of removing the right to belong to a union was invalid, but will then proceed, via a charade of 'consultation', to do it again in a way that would next time sail past the good Mr Justice Glidewell. All of this may add further political damage to what the Prime Minister has already suffered from the episode. For what the judge in effect said has already served to underline the public perception that Mrs Thatcher's concept of government is arbitrary and without care for reaching solutions by consent.

But in fact the Glidewell judgment, far from being a victory, is a further major defeat for government employees who wish to be members of trade unions. For the judge specifically rejected the argument that the government cannot unilaterally alter the terms and conditions of service of a civil servant in order to exclude trade union membership (until this year GCHQ, with the approval of Whitehall, far from objecting to trade union membership was positively encouraging new employees to join).

Although it was not the basis of this judgment, Glidewell confirmed that in his view this power to act unilaterally derived from the Royal Prerogative. The government, as the modern executor of the Royal Prerogative, could thus in the judge's view do whatever it liked to its 'servants'. It was only the manner in which it did it that could be reviewed by the courts. This is not some quirky view of Glidewell's. It reflects the considered view of the British legal system.

The battle to get any change in this position is not, therefore, one that can be advanced in any substantial way through the British courts. It is a political battle and the unions involved must recognise it as such. It is a political battle to alter the nature of the legal relationship between the State and its servants.

One important avenue could still be the European Court, for a constructive judgment there could force some future British government to accept limitations in the Royal Prerogative in these and other areas. It is yet another argument in the increasingly substantial case for reversing British tradition and having here a proper Bill of Rights. We used to think that Parliament alone and an unwritten constitution were enough to preserve fundamental civil rights in this country. We know today that this is not the case. □

Mitterrand's new boy

FRANCE'S NEW prime minister is not one's picture of a typical socialist head of government. He comes from a wealthy background, was a champion showjumper in his twenties and now, prime minister at the age of 37, contrives to make Neil Kinnock look like a parliamentary veteran. Laurent Fabius only became an MP in 1978 and has been a member of the French Socialist Party for a bare ten years.

He is proof that the governments of the French Left have aped the ways of the Right in relying on 'technocrats' to do their political work. Like his socialist colleagues Jacques Chirac, Michel Rochard and Jacques Delors, Fabius is a typical product of the Ecole National d'Administration, which takes the brightest university graduates and turns them into the elite who run the country — whether the government is conservative or socialist.

He has a reputation as an economist and the French government faces a severe economic crisis. But that is not the reason why he has been chosen for the top job. He owes his rise to his limpet-like attachment to President Mitterrand, who admits in public that Fabius is the aide who knows his mind best. He became Mitterrand's *chef de cabinet* in 1976 and ran the presidential election campaign in 1981.

Having such a youthful prime minister may do something to change the image of the French socialist government, badly in need of an uplift. But there is no indication that he has been brought in to change its policies. As Minister of Industry, Fabius preached modernisation and managerial dynamism with such vigour that the *Wall Street Journal* called him the one French socialist minister who understood the needs of private enterprise. It looks certain that Mitterrand is going to use him to stick to France's present austerity programme. □

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CEGB crash stunt hides 'chronic' spills

THIS WEEK'S £2 million CEGB publicity stunt to demonstrate the mechanical strength of nuclear waste flasks has overlooked entirely a separate potential danger to the environment. It is a danger which according to a confidential report *has* — unlike the train crash hazard rehearsed on Tuesday — happened many hundreds of times during the last twenty years.

Details of frequent low level radioactive contamination of both CEGB nuclear flasks and British Rail rolling stock — incidents so common as to seem almost routine — are given in a confidential report prepared last year by a joint CEGB and British Nuclear Fuels Limited (BNFL) panel chaired by J.K. Donoghue, Head of the Safety and Medical Services Department at the Sellafield (Windscale) reprocessing plant. The *New Statesman* has obtained a copy of the panel's report.

The Donoghue report shows that CEGB reassurances concerning the total safety of the nuclear fuel flasks, given once again on Tuesday, are disingenuous. The CEGB has repeatedly stated that: 'No accidents involving the release of radioactivity have occurred in more than 7,000 rail journeys since the first consignment in 1962.' This statement implies that radioactivity has never been released to the environment. In fact there have been many cases of radioactive release, as well as a handful of actual accidents involving flasks — but not together.

The Donoghue report reveals that there were at least 90 cases of contamination during 1980 and 1982, when samples were 'intensively studied'. These figures imply that the total number of such contamination incidents over the last twenty years probably lies between 500 and 1,000. Two thirds of the contaminated flasks are shown, surprisingly, to have been *empty* flasks leaving the Sellafield works, rather than loaded flasks leaving nuclear power stations. Radioactive leakage, the panel reported, was causing: 'chronic . . . occurrence of flask and flatroll (railway wagon) contamination.

Since 1976, at least 11 cases of radioactive contamination of flasks or wagons have had to be formally reported to the Health and Safety Executive and the Secretary of State for Energy because they exceeded 'permitted limits'. Contamination has also been found on railway wagon parts, including 'couplings, hoses and brakewheels', which are routinely handled by unprotected British Rail staff. These wagon parts should never have had any direct contact with the flasks of their radioactive contents, and none of the panel could explain how they had become contaminated.

Another cause of radioactive environmental contamination concealed by the CEGB but details in the Donoghue report is the phenomenon of 'leaching', or 'sweating out' of radioactive substances from the flask paintwork. The substances are absorbed when the flask is immersed in contaminated water during loading at the nuclear power station. If it rains during the transport of the flasks, the substances may form a radioactive puddle on or below the railway wagon. New CEGB cleaning procedures are now said to have 'largely removed' this problem, which was reported here in 1980 (*NS* 12 December 1980).

The panel did not think that the contamination problem could be so easily solved, however: 'We consider the problem is fundamentally one of flask design *which did not take full account of decontaminability* [our italics].' The panel goes on:

'The most likely cause of contamination is thought to be the retention and spillage of contaminated water and radioactive sludge from the cooling ponds in which the flasks are stored at nuclear power stations. Particularly if the flask is inadequately cleaned, radioactive particles and fluid can remain trapped on or near the outside. . . they then 'egress during transportation'.

Donoghue's panel was not charged with eliminating radioactive pollution from the flasks — merely with reducing surface contamination 'as far as is reasonably practicable'. Their report suggested that the core of the problem was the lack of a single designated official being responsible for the 'satisfactory completion of the necessary procedures'.

The report also asserts that although the 'absolute radiological hazard associated with . . . contamination is very low', public safety would benefit if engineers at each nuclear power station and at Sellafield talked to each other: 'Contamination reports might have been reduced had there been more effective and comprehensive exchanges of information and experience both between individual power stations and between organisations . . .'

Martin Bond and Duncan Campbell

Random violence of Notts police

DETAILED allegations of police misbehaviour in policing the miners dispute in the Nottinghamshire area are made in a report to the Yorkshire Area NUM to be published this week. Authors Martin Walker and Susan Miller — NALGO members and police advisers for London boroughs Camden and Greenwich — claim: "The police organised a campaign of terror against striking miners and their families".

In *The Iron Fist*, Vol 2 of *A State of Siege* (*NS* 8 June), they describe in details three incidents in May. The first, on 14 May, followed a miners rally in Mansfield, where there were clashes between police and miners.

Miller and Walker describe how some Yorkshire miners made their way after the rally to Rainworth, a small pit village just east of Mansfield, where they found accommodation and visited the Robin Hood pub. Leaving the pub they discovered police officers waiting outside. The result was a clash one of the miners called 'the most traumatic of my life'.

A miner remembers: 'A truncheon was brought horizontally from the back over my head, in front of my eyebrows and over the bridge of my nose'. He adds: 'My body was being used as a bellows. Finally my head was turned sideways to the ground and something soft like cloth was put under it. Then someone jumped on my head.'

In a second incident, on 16 May in Thorney Abbey Road, Blidworth, police carried out a series of arbitrary arrests of Yorkshire miners who were staying with Nottinghamshire miners. The report's authors argue that one man was in effect 'kidnapped', and claim that 'since that night in May the families concerned have been subject to frequent harassment'.

The third incident is described by the authors as a police riot. Miners on their way to picket Bevercottes Colliery in Nottinghamshire were 'baton charged' at Tuxford Junction, the police going 'berserk'.

Nottinghamshire police say they have received no complaints from any residents of Rainworth, but have had a number of complaints about Blidworth. A senior officer is stated to be investigating miners' complaints against the police.

Arlen Harris

Mother Courage of Vietnam finds son in UK

DUY LAM (above), the Vietnam war 'orphan' who fought against adoption in the UK claiming his mother was still alive looks set to be re-united with his mother — and the *New Statesman* can claim a modest share of the credit.

Sandra Sanger of the British Red Cross clipped and filed our story (by Helen Jacobus NS 11 May) about the fate of the several thousand supposed orphans who were airlifted out of Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, just before it fell to Hanoi in 1975. Included was the tale of Duy Lam, who now attends Sixth Form College from an Ockenden Venture house in Haslemere, Surrey.

When a 'petition' from Ho Chi Minh City concerning a Duy Lam landed on Sandra Singer's desk this week she was immediately convinced it must be from 'our' Duy Lam's mother. It had been routed to her from International Red Cross in Geneva, who in turn had had it from the BBC, who had had the plea from Vietnam at the end of May.

The plea was a 'Petition of seeking for my half-American son Duy Lam who left Saigon with the Redemptist Charity in 1975'. It read in part: 'I received news from a French priest that he was safe, but from that day I have had no news of him. I have asked many Catholic organisations but am always in a state of disappointment. You will know of the great love a mother has of her children. I am very suffering and I am likely to die. . .'

The *NS* was able to put Sandra Sanger in touch with Joyce Pearce of Ockenden Venture — and the news has been broken to Duy Lam, who said he was 'very excited and looking forward' to reading his mother's letter.

Jane Thomas

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ILEA suspected of redeployment 'racism'

AS THE summer term ends ILEA's widely criticised policy of teacher redeployment has run into further difficulty this week, following complaints from a south London school that the impact is racist and discriminatory.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Kingsdale comprehensive in Southwark has written to the Commission for Racial Equality after discovering that five out of seven teachers marked down for redeployment are black.

This apparent discrimination has particularly angered Kingsdale as it would mean, if carried out, that they would be left with only two non white teachers to staff a school with a high percentage of black children — the school's catchment area includes Brixton.

In the letter the NUT concludes that the teachers are being victimised on account of their colour, there being no other evident criteria by which they could have been chosen. NUT representative Rupee Singh says that there are several other departments at the school with teacher surpluses, yet seemingly because they contained no black teachers they were left alone. 'This is quite blatant racism' she says.

Apart from the direct racism apparently involved, the policy demoralises black pupils who see that black teachers are seemingly dispensable and of the least value to the school.

Unhappily for ILEA in this GLC year of anti-racism Kingsdale's complaints are by no means unique. Evidence coming in from schools throughout the capital points to a wider and more disturbing picture.

General Secretary of the Inner London Teachers Association Richard Reiser says he knows of at least nine schools where the majority of those to be redeployed are black.

'It's still relatively early days but I find the trend very worrying indeed, though it's not necessarily a conscious racism. ILEA are getting worried about it too as they know it's not just a handful this is happening to.

Indeed, the speed with which ILEA, not normally known for its swiftness of response, has replied to criticism indicates the extent of its concern. The chairperson of ILEA's schools committee, Barrie Stead, states 'The position at Kingsdale is being investigated to see that agreed procedures have been followed. If these procedures do not reflect the authority's equal opportunities policy, we will seek to amend them at the next round of discussions with the teacher associations.'

John McGhie

Here's £17.50 — find a home

AT LEAST half the 14,000 teenagers who leave council care each year become homeless, says a report in the latest issue of Shelter's magazine *Roof**.

Ex-care teenagers are not the immediate responsibility of any particular governmental agency. Children in care are the responsibility of the local authority social service department until their 18th birthday. After that, there is no legal obligation on councils to help them in any way.

Their plight, Shelter shows, is made worse by the very support provided by council care. As one young man from Brent, now 23, put it: 'In the children's home, you turned on the light or poured your bath and you never had to think about who was paying for it. They did everything for you.'

Shelter first looked at the problem four years ago and was so shocked at its findings that it set up a campaigning group called First Key to fight for the rights of young people leaving care. Formerly it was known as Home Base but Sainsbury's, which runs garden centres of that name, objected to the name being used! Because of lobbying by First Key and other groups, about 30 councils are now making arrangements for kids leaving care, according to Leon Parker of the National Association of Young People in Care.

That's clearly an improvement on the situation four years ago, but half of those reaching 18 still end up with nowhere to go.

The Child Care Act 1980 gives councils the *power*, but does not make it a duty, to make contributions for the housing of care-leavers. Lewisham, in South London, interprets that by giving them a 'leaving care' grant of £500 to help them set up home. Trafford, in Manchester, on the other hand, fobs them off with a measly £17.50.

Trafford social services director David Morrissey would like to do more but is harassed by competing demands. He would welcome new legislation. The Commons Social Services Committee has just convened a working party to examine the law on those leaving care and in evidence First Key has called for it to be mandatory on housing authorities to provide good-standard accommodation for all those leaving care who need it.

The other law change being sought is to make it mandatory on social services departments to continue looking after the welfare of those leaving care. As Mike Goodman, director of First Key, puts it 'People from stable backgrounds find it hard enough, but a kid coming out of care at 18, from an unstable background, hasn't a cat in hell's chance of surviving. Councils are *in loco parentis* until their 18th birthday, and then do nothing. It's absolutely monstrous!'

Christian Wolmar

**From care to nowhere*, Roof *July/August 1984*

MISCELLANY

Four-letter-word horror

Tuesday's *Sun* was suffering from the strike of its 235 journalists and sub-editors. This meant that some things went through that would normally have been rewritten. For the first time since about 1972, the *Sun* used the word 'scab' to describe workers who cross picket lines. It was referring to a year-long strike at a copper mine in Arizona, which has been kept going by scabs. Just like the *Sun*, in fact.

Getting a rise

On Thursday of last week, when rumours were flying about the *Mirror* that the bouncing Czech was indeed to be the proprietor, the National Union of Journalists met in conclave. Our reporter at the event says that *Mirror* diarist Paul Callan's rhetorical question 'What's wrong with Robert Maxwell?' was tersely answered by Joe Haines with words to the effect that the man was a crook and a monster. Maxwell seems to have moved swiftly to contain such opposition, Monday's *Mirror* carried an announcement that Joe Haines, chief leader writer and Harold Wilson's press secretary for seven years, had been appointed an assistant editor.

Plodding on

And now a glimpse of Hendon Police College's sensitive and aware job interview techniques. Recently a young Briton, by name let us say O'Reilly, applied for a job with the boys in blue. First question: 'O'Reilly, that's an Irish name — how sympathetic are you to the IRA?' No doubt pleased by the sweat-inducing success of their opening gambit Messrs Plod then diverted conversation away to the mundanities of school and sport — but only for a moment. On his application form O'Reilly had mentioned that he enjoyed acting. Spotting this the interviewer quizzed him: 'Are you gay?' Unwilling to take no for an answer, a subtle follow-up technique was employed: 'Come on now, you can tell us.' Although neither terrorist nor indeed gay, O'Reilly did not get the job, and is now happily fully employed in the acting profession; we can see why he might prefer it that way.

A clear lead

Which leader-writer would you believe? Here is a quote from an editorial in one of last Sunday's papers: 'It was always likely that a prolonged coal strike would bite at some stage.' Or perhaps you would prefer this: 'With coal stocks still high enough to last well into 1985 there is everything left for the government to play for.' Next question: how much of his leaders does new *Sunday Times* editor Andrew 'Two Chauffeurs' Neil actually write? Both the questions come from the same *Sunday Times* editorial.

Striking difference

Right-wingery takes different forms. Two weeks ago we reported that maverick right-wing Tory councillor David Thompson had voted to give £10,000 to a miners' support group, to the dismay of fellow Conservatives on Lothian council. One of these is a more familiar kind of right-winger: councillor Tony Lester's opinion of the miners' strike was made clear at last week's meeting of the Lothian and Borders Police Board. He said that if the situation justified it he would advocate the use of plastic bullets, 'and just a little whiff of CS gas', against striking miners.

Next door for Mr Toad

Nicholas Ridley, the minister who turned up at the wrong door on his first day at the Department of Transport, seems to be losing touch with the world completely. The other day he had a meeting with the Association of District Councils, which is Tory almost to a councillor. For the first 20 minutes he was under the impression that he was meeting the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the main members of which the government is abolishing. The good news is that one of the many reshuffle rumours is that Ridley is to leave Transport in the autumn. The bad news is that he is tipped to succeed Patrick Jenkin at Environment. Memo to Ridley: It was the door you went to in the first place.

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Bow Street test for Met's anti-apartheid rules

ANTI-APARTHEID demonstrators and the 'Met' will have their eyes fixed on Bow Street Magistrates Court in London this Monday (23 July) when the new police restrictions on the long-established picketing of South Africa House will at last have a test in court.

The first of the 90 or so demonstrators who in just six weeks since 8 June have picked up a total of 108 charges of obstructing the police in the execution of their duty in Trafalgar Square are then expected to come before the magistrates.

Acquittals would infer eventual dismissal of all the other 107 charges to date. They would also make nonsense of the miners-style bail restrictions which Bow Street itself has been imposing on protestors facing obstruction charges. These bind demonstrators out on bail not to take part in any anti-apartheid protest within 30 yards of the east pavement (Trafalgar Square front).

In the last few days five supporters of City AA (City of London Anti-Apartheid group) have been imprisoned for breaching that bail condition: Corrie McClean on 14 July and Edward Arnavoudian, Anthony Clavane, Peter Leonard, and Juliet Richemont on 16 July.

Police have made clear that they will appeal should they lose on Monday; and so will City AA if *they* lose. Meanwhile, supporters of City AA, which has been mounting Friday night pickets of South Africa House for nearly two years — other anti-apartheid organisations have been holding similar pickets for some 29 years — intend to go on defying police restrictions. More arrests can be expected.

Since 7 June Scotland Yard has confirmed, or admitted, that 'Met' Commissioner Sir Kenneth Newman issued a verbal general directive on 8 June, the day after Commander Howlett's 'personal' decision, forbidding demonstrations outside *any* diplomatic premises as being in contravention of the Vienna Convention. It took five hours and 12 successive phone calls to elicit the date of Newman's directive from the Yard.

Farcically, South Africa is not a signatory of the Vienna Convention. The Convention's articles are however enshrined in British law as the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964.

Terry O'Halloran

South African Embassy Picket Campaign 1984 can be contacted c/o Box BM City AA, London, WC1N 3XX (837 6050).

Demonstrations: Fridays 5.30 pm assembling on the steps of St Martins-in-the Fields.

Who will care, if people protest against apartheid on the steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields — separated by the yawning traffic gulf of Duncannon St — instead of in front of South Africa House? Corrie McClean seen defying the police ban. Even the photographer has been arrested 'for taking photographs and demonstrating'.

Hants role in star wars?

A SATELLITE TRACKING station in Hampshire may become part of the United States' 'Star Wars' space defence plans, according to information just released by the Ministry of Defence. By the end of the 1980s, the tracking station at Oakhanger, near Farnham, will make a major contribution to US military space activities, including the Space Shuttle project.

If the United States does not agree to negotiations with the Soviet Union over their new anti-missile and anti-satellite plans, then the late 1980s and early 1990s will see the launch of orbiting space stations and prototype space laser weapons for attacking missiles and satellites. Oakhanger would be a key link in a worldwide chain of ground stations supporting these experiments.

Oakhanger has in fact been involved in secret US space intelligence activities since 1964 and has been a US Air Force Satellite Control Facility since at least 1977 — a fact that the Ministry of Defence attempts to deny.

According to a letter sent to Labour peer Lord Jenkins, two new satellite tracking antennae will be erected at Oakhanger, mainly for US use. Construction of the first tracking dish will start next year. The Ministry's letter says that only US 'liaison' personnel will need to be appointed to the Oakhanger Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE). One of the new dishes, it says, will 'mainly support [the Space] Shuttle programme'.

In its letter, and an accompanying statement, the Ministry has attempted to mislead Parliament by implying that the new tracking dishes will contribute to 'research' for the British military communications satellite Skynet. This is untrue; a new £20 million Skynet tracking station is already being constructed by Plessey and Marconi on another part of the Oakhanger site.

The real purpose of the new RAE tracking dishes was revealed by a specialist US magazine nearly two years ago, which noted that 'wideband communications' and a 'computer capability for [a] new classified satellite program' were to be installed at Oakhanger, as part of a $126 million worth of improvements to the USAF Satellite Control Facility. The Satellite Control Facility at Oakhanger already routinely sends orders to orbiting US satellites, including electronic 'ferrets' and Keyhole photographic intelligence satellites. It is the best-placed station to communicate with the spy satellites as they orbit over Eastern Europe or the western USSR.

Duncan Campbell

Parents resist bulldozing

COVENTRY is witnessing an extreme example of the despair of parents being deprived of a school. In a last-ditch protest thought hopeless by all observers (eg the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* has ceased referring to the issue as one still open to review) 30 parents have barricaded themselves into a primary school in the Bellgreen area.

This week they were defying bulldozers sent to cut off the water supply. The school has been suffering from falling rolls and last year Coventry council decided to close it and transfer the staff and 120 pupils to other schools on the edge of the catchment area. Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, has already ratified the council decision.

The parents are organised as the Bellgreen Action Group. They consider that surrounding schools are already over-crowded — an assertion denied by the Council — and believe that the Council intends to demolish their school building and sell the site to Sainsbury's for a supermarket.

Councillor Harry Richards, chair of the planning committee, calls this a baseless rumour and says no decision has been made on the future of the site 'and no decision will be made while they continue to occupy it.'

Keith Stynes, vice-chair of Bellgreen Action Group, says that having already prevented disconnection of the water-supply by bulldozers the parents 'are prepared to lie down in front of them to save the school.'

Martin Brown

Cleaning up

Privatisation fiasco

THE PRIVATISATION lobby suffered another setback this week. The Birmingham firm ISS Service Systems has asked Birmingham City Council to release it from its three year contract to clean City schools — and has offered the authority a £155,000 sweetener.

Members of the Labour Group which took control from the Tories two months ago are quietly celebrating a very good deal. In return for letting ISS out of the final two years of its contract Birmingham gets the cash compensation and 130 vacuum cleaners thrown in.

The 600 cleaning staff who took redundancy from the Council last year are also laughing. Many of them were hired by ISS but will now get their old jobs back with the Council. Only ISS is left looking less than happy. It originally won the contract on a promise to save the Council £500,000 a year.

Sandra Inge

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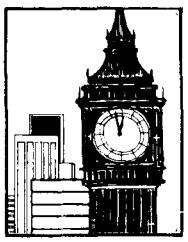

PETER KELLNER Political Editor

Kinnock fights the Principle of the Unripe Time

I TOLD YOU SO. (This column does not believe in such cant as 'I hate to say this, but . . . ') In March, as the first rumbles were heard about involving more Labour Party members in the reselection of MPs, this column challenged the prevailing wisdom that a wider franchise could evolve within the present rules. Here on page seven we argued otherwise: a constitutional change was needed and, moreover, desirable.

It now looks like it will happen. Next week's National Executive will decide whether to propose a rule change at this autumn's party conference. The Organisation Committee has already approved the idea and there must now be an excellent prospect of the change being adopted at Blackpool. Constituency parties would then have three options for deciding how to treat sitting MPs who wish to stand again. They could have a short-list of one, allowing the MP to stand again unchallenged; or they could hold a contested election with the General Committee deciding who the candidate should be; or they could invite the full local party membership to choose.

In one sense the change is less dramatic than it has been portrayed. But in another sense it is more dramatic. And since next week's executive will also discuss a potentially historic settlement of the party's internal defence arguments — of which more a little later — the meeting is likely to be the most significant since Neil Kinnock became leader.

Let us first remove one red herring about reselection. It provides little protection this time round for MPs who have fallen foul of their local general committees. These GCs will still have the choice of using the existing selection system. Writing in last week's *Tribune*, Audrey Wise attacked this as 'a superficial argument. In practice each GC with a sitting member will be stigmatised in the local press as undemocratic unless it chooses the new system'.

Well, Audrey, all I can say it that I hope that GC members will summon up their reserves of courage, principle and dedication and decide to do what they think is right, rather than what will ingratiate them with the local press. If, while I wasn't looking, Labour party activists have started to desert their socialist faith in order to appease the media, this disgraceful — not to say utterly astonishing — trend must be exposed and reversed.

What the new rule will do is enable the spread of party democracy to individual members to continue unhindered. It started last autumn when more than 200 local parties held some form of membership vote to decide whom to support in the leadership and deputy leadership contests. Without the new rule, GCs would be unable to apply the same procedure to reselection *even if they wanted to*. Now the party is inching towards the emancipation of its members. The significance of the move lies not in the impact it will have on Labour's present MPs, but on the momentum it will give towards full democracy in the future.

So far the response of left-wingers has been either to invent procedural difficulties (*Tribune*'s headline on the topic last week was 'Reselection rule change is a recipe for chaos') or to invoke that classic reactionary device for preventing change, the Principle of the Unripe Time. ('This is not the right year to reopen constitutional wrangles.') Only in private has the real objection been uttered: opponents of full democracy prefer the party to have first and second class members. They genuinely believe that GC members are superior to the rest and that ordinary members cannot be trusted to take the 'correct' decision. I hope that at Blackpool at least one delegate will have the courage to expound this view from the rostrum — and that most other delegates will have the courage to reject it.

THERE ARE some people who believe that the arguments over nuclear weapons are even more important than the passions over reselection. Next week's executive has something for them, too. The meeting will decide whether to approve, amend or reject a 30-page paper on defence policy. It is built on three propositions:

- First, that Britain should, unconditionally, become a non-nuclear power. This would involve cancelling the Trident programme, decommissioning Polaris the day Labour takes power (and not just letting it rust gradually away) and requiring the removal of America's cruise missiles.
- Second, that Britain needs to retain, and in some respects even build up, its conventional forces enable it to play a full role within NATO in providing Western Europe with a conventional defence against any Soviet attack.
- Third, that this nuclear-to-conventional switch in defence strategy means that a Labour government could not quickly reduce Britain's defence spending to the same proportion of this country's national income as some other European countries spend.

This is not the first time that the party has tried to bridge the gap between Left and Right on defence. But at every previous attempt the bridge has collapsed — most spectacularly during last year's general election campaign, when the manifesto contained a fatal ambiguity over whether or not a Labour government would give up nuclear weapons unilaterally, or only if negotiations for parallel reductions by the Soviet Union were successful.

The new policy, if approved, will be far more coherent. Its coherence rests on an honest attempt by Left and Right to reconcile their differences, rather than to disguise them with weasel words. The Right's contribution has been to drop the strings it previously attached to unilateralism. It sees Polaris becoming obsolescent; it is appalled by the cost of Trident; it is even more appalled by the dangers of having cruise missiles on British soil. In addition, a number of right-wingers have become increasingly convinced by the recent 'nuclear winter' evidence that it is impossible to have a nuclear war that does not wreck the whole world's ecology. (Roy Hattersley moved the adoption of the new policy at last week's meeting of the International Committee.)

So, at long last, the internal party debate over nuclear weapons is over. But the very fact that an argument that has spanned a quarter-century has now run its course leaves another question to be answered: what should a non-nuclear policy consist of? It is on this that some on the Left are now being asked to bite a mouthful of conventional bullets. Despite repeated conference votes by large majorities that Britain should remain an active member of NATO, there are strong strands of opinion that are a) pacifist and/or b) view the Americans as being as bad as, or worse than, the Russians.

Until now those have been secondary issues within the party: the main battle has been over nuclear arms. But now the nature of a conventional defence policy will become the central issue. There are two ways the party can conduct itself. Either it can continue the war of attrition between Left and Right, resulting in a public brief at the next election that a Labour government cannot be trusted to defend Britain properly.

Or it can seize the opportunity it now has to trade up the historic acceptance by the party's Right of the virtues of unilateralism into a full-scale agreement on what constitutes a defence policy that stands a sporting chance of convincing both the Soviet leaderhip and the British electorate.

It is too much to expect every left-winger on the executive to subscribe to such compromise. What is important is that enough left-wingers do, so that the new policy cannot be labelled as something cooked up by right-wingers exploiting their majority. Alex Kitson, as chairman of Labour's International Committee, already supports the policy. The others who matter are David Blunkett, Doug Hoyle, Michael Meacher and Tom Sawyer. Their opposition would probably not be enough to prevent the new policy being adopted. Rather, their choice is whether Labour's new defence policy is achieved by the counting of heads or, far more satisfactorily, by the meeting of minds. □

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Cruel and unusual treatment

James Lefanu looks back at over more than a decade of experimentation in treating breast cancer. He finds that there was no basis to early claims of cancer

THE OLD aphorism 'Doctors can always bury their mistakes' has recently acquired a fresh twist. It is now possible to bury the truth of medicine's more catastrophic experiments in the mountains of scientific data found in the medical journals and conference reports that constitute the 'medical literature'. Within this, the growing body of research on the treatment of breast cancer with anticancer drugs might only suggest that such therapy is of little value. For the gravedigger it is the epitaph on one of the most disquieting chapters in the history of medicine.

In the late 1960s it became possible to cure many cases of childhood cancer with cytotoxic drugs. These drugs (based on the compounds used in chemical warfare in the First World War) are literally cell poisons. They work because, though they injure the normal cells of the body, they are even more lethal for the rapidly dividing cancer cells. Not surprisingly they have serious side effects but the disease being treated is so remorseless that the cost is tolerable. 'Diseases desperate grown, by desperate appliances are relieved — or not at all.' Children treated at that time are now alive and well in early adult life. Their survival is one of the great achievements of scientific medicine.

But these childhood cancers are only a fraction of the total. So, would the therapy be effective in other types of cancer too? In the wake of those early successes the new medical speciality of clinical oncology — the study of tumours — expanded rapidly, recruiting many doctors anxious to answer that question.

Breast cancer was an obvious target. In England and Wales it killed 12,405 women in 1982, the most fatal of all cancers for women. For most women with the disease their only symptom is a lump in the breast. However many will have 'micrometastases', small clumps of cancer cells elsewhere in the body that will grow and produce their own symptoms. When this happens the cancer is said to have 'relapsed' and though treatment can be given death will inevitably follow. Why not give these women cytotoxic drugs at the same time as cutting out the primary tumour? The drugs might, by destroying the micrometastases, effect a permanent cure. This treatment is known as 'adjuvant cytotoxic chemotherapy', that is, the use of cytotoxic drugs in addition to the standard treatment of surgery and radiotherapy.

The theory appears simple, but there are major problems with this approach to treatment as there are two groups of women who would receive it with no hope of benefit. Some women do not have micrometastases and would have been cured by the removal of the cancer by surgery (about 15 per cent). Others have a

cancer which is not sensitive to the drugs (about 50 per cent). So for 100 women being treated, 65 will receive the drug with no hope of benefit. As there is no way of telling who those 65 are, all 100 have to receive the drugs. And of the 35 per cent who do benefit it now appears that it is not the poisonous character of the drugs that produces the results.

For the patients, the worst problem is the treatment's 'side effects'. Nausea and vomiting are common, loss of hair, inflammation of the mucous membranes, general tiredness will frequently occur. To precipitate these effects in women who are otherwise well (besides recovering from the trauma of having a breast, or part of a breast removed) is obviously difficult to justify.

So the concept of adjuvant therapy had first to be tested in clinical trials in which the effects of the drugs could be compared with a placebo. And the only definition of success had to be that some at least of the cancers were cured. For the drugs only to defer the time before the metastases became apparent and the patient relapsed was not good enough; briefly prolonging life in the few who had responded would have been bought at too high a cost of a wretched and pointless treatment for those who had not survived.

And this poses the last and most difficult problem. A woman may relapse and die from her metastases as long as ten years after the cancer first become apparent. Until this time has elapsed it is not possible to say whether cure has been achieved. So any scientific study has to run for at least five and preferably ten years before a definitive answer on whether the treatment works can be given.

TWO GROUPS of investigators took up the challenge to see if adjuvant therapy did work. Dr Bernard Fisher in the United States under the auspices of the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast Project (NSABP) and Gianni Bonadonna at the Istituto Nazionali Tumori in Milan.

In 1975 Fisher reported the preliminary results of a trial of 269 women in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*. In this trial women had either been given the cytotoxic drug Melphalan for five days every six weeks for two years or a placebo. After only two years of 'follow up' he showed that 9 per cent of those receiving Melphalan had relapsed compared to 22 per cent receiving the placebo. He concluded that the drug 'had been demonstrated to be effective' but wondered whether 'the results would be manifested in survival rates'.

The next year Bonadonna again in the *New England Journal* reported his preliminary results on 391 women given three cytotoxic drugs Cyclophosphamide, Methotrexate, and Floururacil (CMF) or placebo. His results, based on only two years' follow-up, were even better than Fisher's. Five per cent had relapsed in the treatment group compared to 24 per cent taking the placebo. Accompanying this article was an editorial, 'Major Advance in Breast Cancer', written by Dr James Holland of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. He described Bonadonna's work as being of 'monumental importance'. The results were 'nothing short of spectacular'.

This editorial proved to be the green light, which the newly recruited ranks of clinical oncologists had been waiting for. The results were so 'spectacular' that overnight it became unethical *not* to give all women with breast cancer this treatment, especially in the US, where it provided a major source of income for many oncologists. And if the results were so spectacular for breast cancer, why not try it in other cancers too? Similar trials of adjuvant chemotherapy were organised in patients with a whole range of other cancers of the gut, the lung, the head and neck and so on.

The results had proved nothing. Indeed it would have been surprising if the trials had not shown a benefit in postponing relapse for those women whose cancers were sensitive to the drugs. The drugs would have slowed the growth of the metastases and so delayed their appearance. On the critical question of whether they *cured* the cancer it was much too early to say, a point reflected in the cautious comments of the *British Medical Journal* which advised British doctors to stick to the conventional treatment for the time being at least.

But then a curtain of silence descends. Bernard Fisher was never again to report on the fate of the women in this first trial in any widely circulated medical journal. He did publish another paper in the *New England Journal* in

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If you believe only a miracle can beat cancer, here's twenty.

To a lot of people the word 'cancer' is one of the most frightening in the English language.

They believe it's always incurable.

That it's the death sentence by another name.

And that the only thing they can do about it is hope for a miracle.

For many cancer sufferers, however, there is already far more than just hope.

Below you'll find evidence of the progress cancer research has made in recent years.

Of the many thousands to whom the word 'cancer' is no longer a death sentence.

And of the many areas of research now being successfully pursued.

Much remains to be done of course. (Especially since cancer does cause the death of nearly 147,000 people in this country every year.)

But as you'll see, cancer is being beaten.

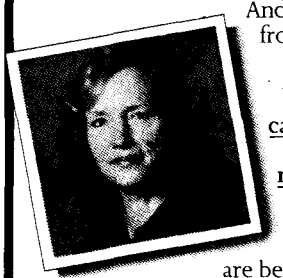
1. As recently as 10 years ago, cancer killed hundreds of children every year. Now it's curable in 2 out of 3 cases.

2. One in ten of all cancers are skin cancer. Most are now entirely curable.

3. Forty years ago, doctors had no drug treatment to give cancer patients. Today there are over 30 effective anti-cancer drugs.

4. In the 1950's only 1 in 3 children with Hodgkin's disease survived. Since then the success rate has doubled.

5. The discovery of links between cigarette smoking and lung cancer has done much to persuade people not to smoke. And at last the deaths from lung cancer are beginning to fall off.



Lorna Branczik was treated for cancer in 1971 and after three months was able to return to a full life.

6. Thirty years ago sufferers of testicular cancer had only a 50% survival rate. Today it's almost 90%.

7. The invention of the body scanner and its development during the 1970's has greatly improved the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

8. Research has shown that 80% of cancers may be directly caused by our environment or life style, and therefore may be preventable.

9. Young people who would once have died from kidney cancer are now usually able to make a full recovery.

Jenny Lockyer was treated for cancer 16 years ago. Today she leads an active normal life.

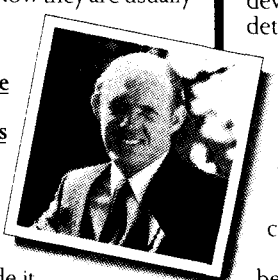
10. The discovery of many cancer causing chemicals and materials, and the subsequent controls placed on them has greatly reduced the chances of getting cancer at work.

11. The introduction of cervical screening for women means that the risk of developing cancer of the cervix can be detected. And therefore, the disease is preventable.

12. Some hospitals now have specialist teams covering all aspects of cancer treatment, enabling patients to benefit from a greater range of expertise.

13. Not long ago 90% of all women with choriocarcinoma (cancer of the placenta) would have died. Today 90% recover.

14. Certain cancers of the ovary which occur in very young women were always fatal in the past. Now they are usually cured.



Eleven years ago, John Hill was told he had cancer. Today he is cured and leads a full family life.

15. The discovery of certain antibodies which home in on tumours has made it possible not only to locate otherwise hidden cancers but also to target anti-cancer drugs to destroy them.

16. Developments in radiotherapy have produced more accurate and more powerful machines which make the treatment both more acceptable and more effective.

17. Just five years ago scientists could only theorize about the innermost workings of cancerous cells. Today, new technology is enabling them to unravel the whole mystery.

18. Research has discovered that cancerous tumours often produce marker-substances in the body. These can be detected at a very early stage when the cancerous tumours can be eradicated.

19. Not only are doctors and scientists finding ways to cure cancer, they're also finding ways to ensure that the quality of life is subsequently undiminished.

20. In the past, cancer was almost inevitably a fatal disease. Today over 60,000 people are cured each year in Britain.

Of course, we at the Cancer Research Campaign cannot claim responsibility for all these developments.

They are the result of a worldwide campaign by many thousands of researchers and doctors.

Terry Mason was only eight when he developed cancer. Today he leads a normal schoolboy life.

However, as Britain's largest supporter of cancer research we do help finance over 600 projects throughout the country.

These cover everything from studying how cancer starts and how to prevent it, to developing new techniques for early detection and cure.

To continue these projects and start more, we need your contribution.

This can be either a donation through a deed of covenant, legacy or money.

Or a donation of your time in helping our local committees.

Over 92% of all the money we collect goes straight into research.

So however you can help us, you can be sure you'll be helping to give Britain's cancer sufferers a better chance.

Write to us now at Dept. NS1, 2 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AR.

Or contact your local Cancer Research Campaign through the telephone directory.

The sooner you do, the sooner we'll be able to add another miracle.

Together, we can beat cancer.

Cancer Research Campaign

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1981 presenting the early results of another trial using a different set of drugs. Again it was after two years of follow-up and again it showed good results in the 'reduction of treatment failures' (deferment of relapse). He did however in the same paper say that his first trial had 'proved the worth of Melphalan'. Had it?

THE FOLLOW-up results on that first trial were submitted to a meeting of the NSABP in 1982. The paper was marked 'Confidential, not for publication or citation.' Some of the results can however be found in an abstract from a US conference report on the treatment in the same year. The advantage to the treated women had all but disappeared (with the exception of one group) there was no difference in relapse or death rates compared to the women who had received the placebo. The exception was the group of women who had contracted the cancer before the onset of the menopause and in whom the tumour had spread to the local lymph nodes. Of the 269 women in Fisher's original trial it was possible to say that six (2.2 per cent) might have benefited by having their relapse postponed for more than five years. When in 1983 a British group of oncologists — who have throughout been more sceptical than their American colleagues — reported their experience of using Melphalan they could not even demonstrate this benefit. Far from the trial having proved the 'worth' of Melphalan, they concluded: 'There is no place for the use of Melphalan as adjuvant therapy in the treatment of breast cancer'.

When Bonadonna reported on his trial again he drew criticism that the results were biased in favour of the treatment group. He too then lapsed into silence until a letter in the *Lancet* observed that had Sherlock Holmes been reading Dr Watson's medical journals he would have noticed that 'the dog had stopped barking'. The reason for Bonadonna's reticence was apparent in his reply. The advantage to the treated women had all but disappeared except in the same group of women that Fisher had shown. And here a paper to be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Lancet* comes in. The same group of British oncologists having repeated Bonadonna's trial of three cytotoxic drugs found that exactly the same number of women had died in the treatment group as the control group, though there were fewer relapses in the premenopausal women.

But they also hint at something else: that the prevention of relapse in these women is not all related to the ability of the cytotoxic drugs to kill cancer cells. One of the effects of the drugs is to destroy the function of the ovaries (a 'chemical castration' in medical jargon) with a consequent fall in the level of circulating female sex hormones. It has been known for a long time that some of the cases of breast cancer in premenopausal women are sensitive to these hormones and will grow more slowly if a drug that blocks their action is given.

The 'major advance in breast cancer treatment', it turns out, could be only a particularly crude and unpleasant way of achieving a result that can be obtained by giving a cheap and virtually nontoxic drug, which acts on the hormones only.

IN THE excited rush to find a medical cure for breast cancer the original papers described the side effects of chemotherapy as 'acceptable'. An account by the Breast Unit of the Royal Marsden Hospital in 1980 of the quality of life of women receiving adjuvant chemotherapy including the drugs included in Bonadonna's trial tells a different story.

One third said the treatment was 'unbearable.' A further third found it 'most unpleasant' and said they had 'dreaded receiving it'. The effects start with a 'peculiar malaise'. One woman said: 'No words can describe the sensation you euphemistically call "off colour" which starts about an hour after the injection. The unpleasant sensation crawls around the body. It feels as though one has had an anaesthetic that has not worked property, only it is worse than that — it is vile. Then comes nausea and vomiting, moderate to severe in 80 per cent of cases and in some women lasting for several days after each course of drugs (which in Bonadonna's trial lasted for a year). Such was the dread of the treatment that some people vomit just at the thought of receiving the drugs, or when a smell or sight reminiscent of the clinic triggers off their nausea. All women lost their hair. Inflammation of the mucous membranes, cystitis, alterations in the sense of smell and taste were all reported.

Another study reported the psychological problems of women receiving the Bonadonna regime. Three quarters developed an anxiety state and became depressed. More than two thirds developed 'sexual problems', described as a 'serious loss of interest.' How could the original investigators have regarded this level of misery endured for such an uncertain benefit as acceptable?

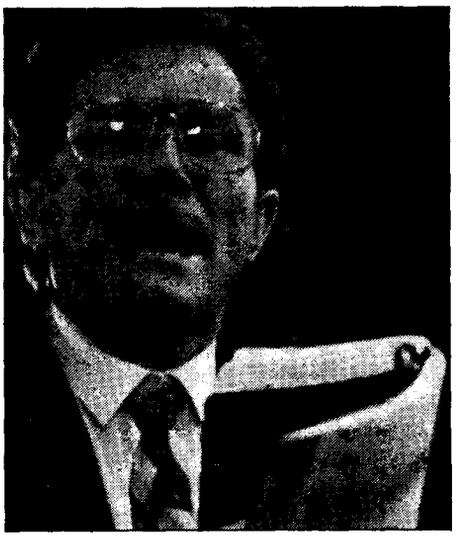
It should have been obvious as late as 1979, six years into the trials, that adjuvant therapy was not going to achieve the criteria of 'cure' required to make it worthwhile. But by this time it had become established treatment within the profession. A veil was drawn over the long term results, and if questions were asked the answer was the women had not been sufficiently 'compliant' in taking their medication, or the original drug regimes had been insufficiently 'aggressive'. The fact that British oncologists were consistently more sceptical and reluctant to convert wholesale to adjuvant chemotherapy points to the weakness of the evidence.

Leading oncologists in Britain have been placed in a dilemma. No matter how sceptical they might have been they had no alternative but to repeat the trials to find out for themselves. From that, the nature of the catastrophic experiment began to dawn on them. Since then they have been trying to stamp out the use of adjuvant chemotherapy.

In 1980 Professor Michael Baum of King's College Hospital castigated the American oncologists as being 'notorious for their tunnel vision' who he said 'had to continue struggling to justify their very existence as a specialty'. Professor Tim McElwain of the Royal Marsden spoke of 'the confusion of business with progress' in which 'nasty drugs are thrown at unfortunate patients with very little evidence of gain'. And last year Dr Ian Smith also of the Royal Marsden judged that: 'For early breast cancer there is nothing wrong with the concept, the problem is that the drugs are just not good enough.' □

EVANGELISM

Mission over



Dave Hampshire

Paul Fisher reports on the happenings at QPR

'HOW MANY are aged 25 and under?' booms the voice of Luis Palau over the loud speakers. A thousand hymn sheets wave along the terracing. 'Alright, alright, a marvellous percentage.' Luis Palau (above) and his Mission to London are heavily into numbers. They claimed a quarter of a million attendees at Queen's Park Rangers football ground, of whom about 16,000 trekked across the lurid green swathe of Astroturf to give themselves to Jesus. That's nothing though. In Guatemala City, there were 828,000 in eight days and 3,800 'enquirers'.

Up amongst £280,000 worth of podium and public address gear, Palau broadcast and held them, rapt. His jitterbugging was symetrical and dramatic enough to make him worth watching across the width of a football pitch. A great act, but he wasn't whipping anything like the hysteria which the football skills of Rodney Marsh excited on this same pitch. His manner is that of a corporation accountant, brisk bland and businesslike in conversation; little uninhibited fervour bursts through the discreet blazer and slacks when he addresses the masses.

The sermon mixed an uncompromising trot through 'the teenage ten commandments' with inconclusive little parables. In the beginning he was a Godless Argentinian with a plan to kill his wicked uncle. Uncle Martin, for it was he, had been ripping off the Palau family business and the young Luis plotted a shot gun revenge in direct contravention of the sixth commandment. The Lord stepped in to save them both and Luis, now an American citizen, has been going by the book ever since.

He preached a respect for authority and parents, even if your mother is a 'much divorced woman'. There was no doubting his

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drift when he outlined the immutable 'moral laws' enshrined in the ten commandments. 'You live in a society which would love to act as if there were no moral laws.' Heads nodded, the stadium lights came on. He poured scorn on the Bishop of Durham, the man who would deny an immaculate conception. 'Trying to accommodate God to SCIENCE.' Never did the word sound more contemptuous.

All ears picked up when he got on to adultery, but he was short and to the point. 'Fellers, girls. Sex is a beautiful gift from God.' A gift for heteros only though, and they've got to take a trip to the altar first. All else is deviation so it's no wonder that the Gay Christian Movement, for one, is narked.

The Message has an obvious appeal to those who accommodate their belief in the next world to their high material investment in the earthly powers that be. It is the bedrock of conservatism the world over; not so much blessing secular institutions but insisting that they are not the issue. Ordinary mortals should leave the moneylenders in the temple and drive out the sin from their own heart instead. It is no great surprise therefore to find so many Conservatives among the backers who organised the Mission to London.

Amongst a committee of Baptist clergy (with a sprinkling of evangelical Methodists) were Sir Kenneth Cork, the ex-Lord Mayor of London and official receiver, Sir Cyril Black, a Baptist businessman and former Tory MP, David Pickford, chairman of a property firm called Haslemere Estates and two construction knights, Sir Kirby and Sir Maurice Laing. Completing the Right's roll of honour were a two pronged publicity team comprising a Tory consultant called Harvey Thomas who has handled public relations, and The Sales Promotion Agency, a Saatchi and Saatchi offshoot which did the ads.

John Honsinger is the managing director in charge of The Sales Promotion, creative bods who came up with such lines as 'Follow this bus to QPR and Luis Palau will take you further' and 'Take your doubts to Luis Palau'. It has been much like packaging any other product. And Honsinger has had plenty of practice in promoting the product people didn't think they want, having in the past persuaded souls to smoke more Silk Cut cigarettes, drink more John Bull bitter and spend more on the pools. Not the sort of things Palau approves of.

'We've made him credible,' says Honsinger. 'In the context of promoting a person, it's unique and has never been done before. We would have done it differently if it had been someone well known like the Pope or Billy Graham.' Honsinger, a lapsed Catholic, is happy with the results, which include the 15 per cent agency commission on the £228,779 ad spend.

By all accounts Harvey Thomas, a Baptist, worked harder and did not take a penny for his efforts. He earns his keep as a Tory consultant and has done everything from introducing the disguised autocue at party conferences to organising that Youth Rally where Kenny Everett made his crack about bombing the Russians. 'Most of what Kenny said,' reminisces Thomas, 'was so obscene that it couldn't have been broadcast. Strictly off the record, I can tell you we won't be using him again.'

Thomas staunchly maintained that his man was apolitical until Palau blew the gaffe and agreed that he is best described as 'to the right of centre'. Thomas also likes to think of the Mission to London as thoroughly ecumenical although he was unable to name the Catholic churches which had made donations. Unable too to recall the name of the Catholic bishop who had sat on Palau's platform one night, and unsure whether a picture of some nuns showed a Catholic or an Anglican presence. The Catholic PR people were mystified too.

In South America, where chunks of the Roman Catholic hierarchy have pledged their church to fighting poverty, Palau represents the fast-emerging trend of Protestant evangelical conservatism there. Two conferences of Latin American Catholic bishops have, over the last 15 years, interpreted the gospel message as one which gives humans the dignity to organise and demand their rights from their oppressors.

'From a Christian perspective,' Palau explains, 'we say the problem of society has spiritual roots; it is sin. Sin, say the liberation theologians, is in the structures and institutions of society. The biblical Christian would say that man is sinful and he creates a sinful society. For liberation theologians, redemption comes in destroying institutions. Right? We say you've got to take a step back and change the heart of man.'

Pamela Hussey at the Catholic Institute for International Relations reckons: 'In terms of the Latin Americans Palau supports, I am a communist.' Emily Ryan at the Guatemalan Committee for Human Rights cites Palau's active support of General Rios Montt in Guatemala. She also says he shared a platform with the even more murderous General Somosa. Palau denies the latter and claims that Rios Montt appeared as an uninvited guest at his massive Guatemalan rally. □

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ECONOMY

Thatcher's crisis

Professor Maurice Peston argues that government policies are leading nowhere

LAST WEEK's 'economic crisis' is not identical to its predecessors of the fifties, sixties and seventies, but it is similar enough. This must be a source of puzzlement to those monetarists who really believed that they had made a new and positive contribution to economic analysis and economic policy.

Most monetarists, of course, are not serious people. They simply use the rhetoric to obscure their attacks on public services and the welfare state. (I might add that their natural counterparts are some alleged Keynesians who believe Keynes was a socialist and the patron saint of high levels of public expenditure.)

But what of the true monetarist believers? They claim that strict control of the money supply is feasible and will reduce and then remove inflation. The result will be fast economic growth and the maintenance of full employment, as long as the government itself refrains from interfering in the economy, and lets the private sector get on with things. The abolition of exchange control enables financial markets to allocate resources efficiently on a world-wide scale, and this will be assisted by allowing the exchange rate of sterling to float and adjust to its value. Change in the financial and economic systems will take place, but in a smooth fashion as long as the government operates sensibly and sticks to its medium term financial strategy.

The Holy Trinity of control of the money supply, floating sterling and free capital movements is supposed to give us the best of all financial and economic worlds. But how then to explain what has actually happened? One set of answers would be that given by the monetarist counterpart of the creationists. The government has erred from the true doctrine; and the economic equivalent of the deity has sent down lightning in the form of the drop in sterling and the rise in interest rates to warn us. If we do not mend our ways, there will be worse to come and the whole economic structure will be destroyed.

The difficulty for the government in all that is, first, that it is not at all clear what it now ought to do; and, secondly, Mrs Thatcher's claim that the economy is in good shape. The latter is sheer blasphemy in the face of what has actually occurred, but what of the former? On monetary control, there is the problem of which measure of money supply one ought to control and which measure one can control — the two not usually being the same. The current answer appears to be to choose several (and invent some more); which is rather akin to backing every horse in the race and then claiming to have picked the winner.

There is also a more important technical matter to bear in mind. If the money supply (however it is measured) is difficult to control, but the government has pledged itself to control it, every 'bad' set of money figures will provoke a crisis. Far from giving stability, the government will be interfering continuously in an effort to fine tune the money supply and bank lending. If it claims that its monetary difficulties are all to do with public spending, it will end up in the crazy position of being more Keynesian than the Keynesians, making attempts to control public expenditure also on a monthly basis.

To revert to the religious analogy, one response to the current crisis and the likelihood of further crises in the years to come is a move towards fundamentalism. More stringent money supply targets may be set within narrower bands and greater efforts made to reduce public expenditure. A move may be made towards yet more primitive doctrines: (a) an acceptance, perhaps even an encouragement, of still greater unemployment, and (b) a reduction in the real value of social security benefits so that much greater hardship results from losing a job. Neither of these bears any resemblance to contemporary thinking or to the Tory election manifesto of 1979, but they are a direction in which some monetarists would like to go.

THE ALTERNATIVE is for the government to learn from its own experience. One lesson which is hard for them to accept is that monetarism, especially in its new classical form, is — simply speaking — mistaken. The economies of the advanced industrialised world do not work that way. Some economies work better than others; and no one doubts either that the British economy is more backward than most, or that one of the areas urgently in need of reform is the labour market. But whether you look at US, Swedish, Japanese or French experience, monetarists do not provide enlightenment.

Unfortunately, judging from Mrs Thatcher's critical response to the crisis and Mr Lawson's earlier Mais lecture, the government is not open to argument. (This is even though early on they at least accepted the key shift in a Keynesian direction by instituting an incomes policy for the public sector. Even if it were true that controlling the money supply is the key to controlling inflation they now appear to have got into the position that controlling public sector pay is the key to controlling the money supply. So much for the trivial proposition that inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon!)

They do not even appear willing to follow Mr Reagan by now pursuing Keynesian (or more correctly fiscalist) expansionism, while cynically pretending still to be true believers. The result is that the economy will fluctuate much as before. There will be a move towards a new recession in a year or so, followed by at least a small scale pre-election boom. We shall continue to be exposed to the vagaries of US behaviour (which by chance will sometimes work in our favour). At the same time we shall persist in opposing co-ordinated European action of an expansionary kind.

This means that the task of whatever government really tries to get the country going again will be so much harder. Setting aside all the arguments of whether the engine of advance will be the public or private sectors or both, or will be based on manufactured goods or financial and other services or both, the targets of full employment and maximum rates of development are receding rapidly.

The economic goals of the last Labour manifesto, interpreted literally, were naive, but at least they were in the right direction. Four years from now something much more cautious maybe just as hard to achieve. In due course interest rates will drop somewhat and inflation too will fall, having risen. But none of that should disguise the longer run mess the country has been dropped into since 1979.

THE REASONS are obvious.

- First, there is the frittering away of North Sea oil which has been used to finance imports of finished manufactures and the accumulation of overseas financial portfolios. It has not been channelled directly into the regeneration of the home economy.
- Secondly, there is the vast damage done to the employability of the labour force by the experience of unemployment. I, for one, strongly favour an extension of training for young and old alike, and support a key role for the Manpower Services Commission. But it is both hypocrisy and a waste of resources to train people and not provide the effective demand that then leads to jobs for them.
- Thirdly, those workers who have suffered real income cuts continue to aspire to restoring some at least of what they have lost. While they have more hope for this under a new regime, the pressure they are likely to put into the economic system may easily destroy the incomes policy on which all else depends. We may face once again the recurring tragedy of UK economic management, that in precisely those circumstances in which an incomes policy can do most good, forces will be activated which prevent that policy proceeding at all.
- Fourthly, the abolition of exchange control means that a new government will have little or no leeway before facing its first international crisis. There are effective and subtle ways of coping with that, but it still means that a new Chancellor may be diverted for a while from his real objectives of full employment and maximum output.

If one assumes a world in which there is perfect competition, no trades unions, people have stable demands for money, and the economy moves automatically and rapidly towards full employment, then there is little for the government to do but to control the money supply and limit the rate of rise of prices in general.

Most of us have described such states of the world to our first year students and suggested that it would be useful to examine them as academic exercises.

Little did we realise that the academic first year problem would become the basis of the economic beliefs of powerful governments. Even less did we appreciate that economists in academic life and the public service, who ought to know better, would promulgate such nonsense. The costs have been enormous, and, naturally enough, they are not borne by those who give rise to them, but by ordinary working people. □

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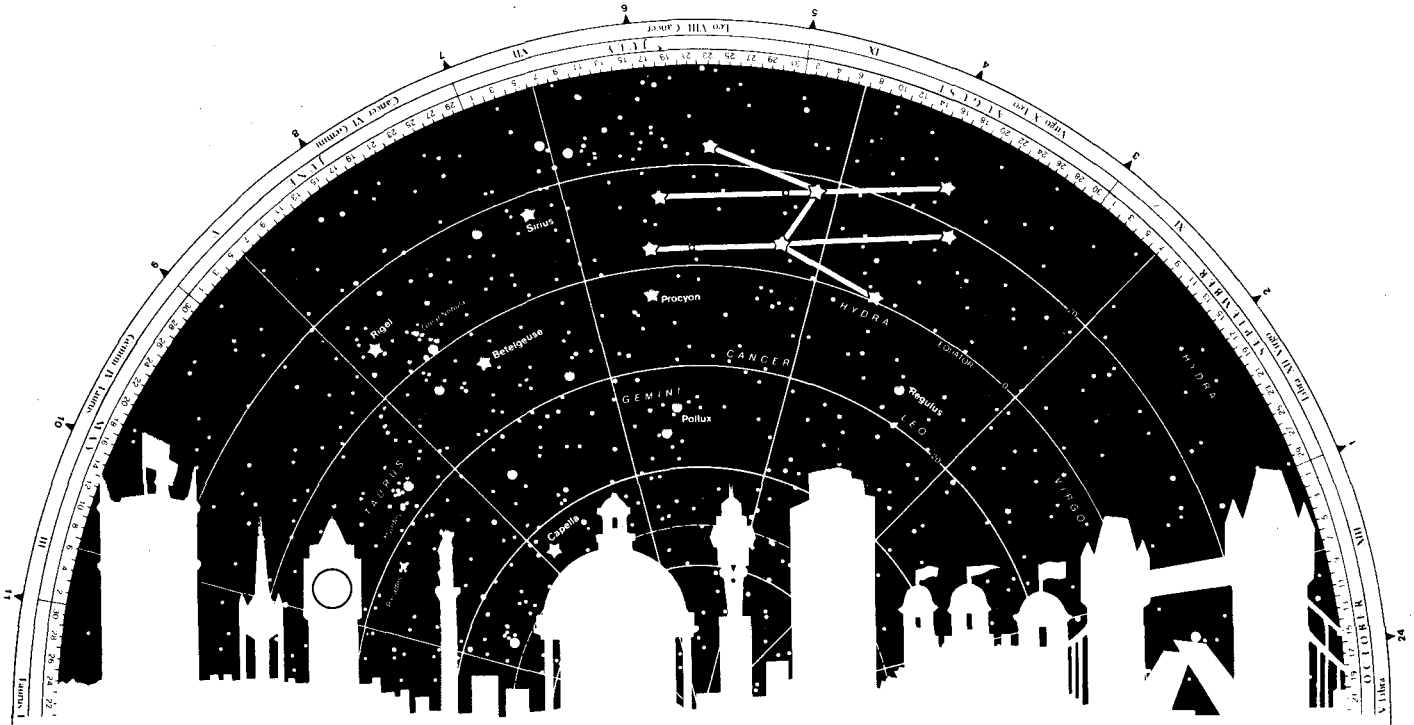

Prospects for the railway customer look much better.

The signs for the future of British Rail are encouraging. The results for 1983 were the best for 6 years. And the railway operating surplus of £62 million, before interest, was the largest ever recorded in the 21 year history of the Railways Board.

Overall the Board made a surplus of £8 million, a significant achievement when compared to the previous year's loss of £175 million.

In terms of investment too, British Rail is standing on its own feet.

Last year, all capital investment was funded entirely from within the business.

Increasing efficiency

In 1981 the railway was restructured into five manageable parts, three for the passenger business – InterCity, London and the South East, and Provincial Services – and one each for Freight and Parcels.

Each has a Sector Director responsible for meeting defined financial targets and levels of service.

This new structure has given the railways a much sharper commercial edge.

Throughout the business the operation has been streamlined by reducing the number of management levels.

The result, is a more efficient railway, which gives better value for money.

The key to securing the future

With improving efficiency, new investment becomes the key to the future.

This is projected to rise from last year's £270 million to £380 million in 1986.

During the same period, there will be a saving of 25% in Government support for maintaining the national rail network.

This will not involve drastic service cuts, but will come mainly from increased efficiency and from more accurately matching service supply to customer demand.

Serving the Customer

A very bright future exists for an efficient, modern service that responds to customer demand.

"Our industry will prosper or decline according to whether we give our customers the service and quality they seek and whether they see it as value for money" (Chairman of British Rail, Dec '83).

This philosophy is already working well. The freight vehicle fleet, for instance, has been reduced by 55% since 1979 and is now better suited to Railfreight's target markets. The improvement in freight vehicle utilisation averaged 14% annually between 1979-82 and rose to over 16% in 1983.

On the passenger business a 7% increase in traffic is forecast by 1986.

In truth, the prospects for the railway customer look much better.

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GREENHAM

Ratepayers revolt

Lynne Jones wanted to discover why the residents of Greenham Common were hostile to the peace campers. So she went to talk to them

FOR A GROUP that wishes to be known as peace-loving and law-abiding, RAGE is a curious acronym to have chosen. It stands for Ratepayers Against The Greenham Encampments and was founded in February by Anthony Meyer who, as he explained in *Newbury Weekly News,* had reached breaking point after the incident of a peacewoman breast-feeding her baby in front of a class. An inaugural meeting of 20 was held, a committee elected, an advertising campaign initiated and it has gone on from there.

John White, Tory Councillor for Thatcham, explained to me how it worked. There is no membership, but it claims at least 3,000 active supporters. There are no open meetings but the committee meets regularly to decide on tactics and organise meetings to which selected people, 'both critics and supporters' are invited. It has to be select because 'peoples' homes are too small to have too many' Mrs White explained.

Supporters are sent a pack explaining why RAGE exists: '. . .because of the financial burden of the peacewomen, their law breaching attitude and lack of consideration. . . the additional burden of filth, inconvenience, blatant destruction to flora and fauna and above all loss of freedom and security.' They are encouraged to write to *Newbury Weekly News* and to put pressure on the local authorities. A list of the relevant ones as well as the names of councillors with a 'positive' attitude is enclosed. They are also encouraged to circulate a petition objecting to the 'Greenham Squatters' and to donate funds.

Money comes entirely from voluntary donations. Illegal tactics or vigilante activity of any kind is not allowed — they are a 'lawful' and 'professional' organisation. In fact, the Whites felt very strongly that RAGE was responsible for curbing and containing the vigilante element. 'If we were unlawful, the peacewomen wouldn't be there, the ill-feeling is so great.' Most important of all, I was to understand and it was impressed upon me repeatedly that RAGE was *not* political, but purely a local campaign concerned with a local nuisance.

I WAS sitting in John Learoyd's living room listening to him as press officer for RAGE, John White, and Alex Hutcheon, fellow committee member, tell me how they felt about Greenham: 'self-indulgent women, flouting the law of the land' — Alex Hutcheon; 'who have nowhere else to go because nobody wants them' — John Learoyd; 'who do in fact run lesbian encampments and therefore in our eyes create an immoral situation' — Alex Hutcheon.

I heard how a band of 'stinking, dirty, half-naked women' had obstructed Mrs Learoyd's path. 'No, I'm being unfair. On that occasion they were in T-shirts and shorts but they have been topless. I think in this day and age that that is not a major consideration of the residents.' John White interjected, 'Some people do find it offensive.' 'What we're really concerned with is the loss of a way of life — the painting, the litter, the stone throwing, yes, my wife has had stones thrown at her.'

'Don't you feel threatened by the base?' I asked. 'I feel more threatened by nakedness,' John Learoyd replied. 'No,' said John White, 'I feel much more threatened by the precipitation of lawlessness that very minor groups of people inflict on the British way of life — you can see it on the picket lines with the miners.'

So that I could get a better understanding, he offered to drive me round the base, to meet some supporters and see some things I might not have noticed. Which is how at 7 o'clock in the evening I found myself standing with the Whites and Mr Burbrage, an elderly man leaning on a stick, staring at the fence. A watchtower empty above me, brown scarred earth beyond the wire. 'The woods used to come right down to the wire, you couldn't see the fence at all, it was absolute Heaven — I stopped 15 of your ladies the other night, and I said to one very nice lady, "you're a lovely lady" — and she was — "but you're wrong. . . you've bitched up my life and I hate your guts for it."

'It's not what they're demonstrating about. It's the manner in which it's done that upsets the locals', John White insisted, 'that tower there, the barbed wire, the lights, the total destruction of flora and fauna here all occurred directly because of the peacewomen and I find it all most offensive.'

Didn't the fence, which Mr Burbrage hates so, have something to do with the missiles, I remonstrated; after all 55 per cent of the population objected to cruise? 'RAGE', John White repeated 'is not about the issue of CND but the antisocial behaviour of a lawless group of people.' 'If we felt that what they were doing was going to make the slightest bit of difference to whether or not there is a nuclear war; if we thought they could stop a nuclear war by being up here, by doing anything! We'd be up here with them', Mrs. White remarked. 'So, it's because you don't think we're being effective?' I replied. 'That's right.'

The conversation continued as we drove around the base. 'This country is the most democratic and free in the whole world but with all the lawlessness emerging, we're going to end up with an armed police force; that's why I keep mentioning the miners.' 'Isn't it possible,' I asked, 'that the democracy you value so highly was achieved by people breaking unjust laws — such as the Tolpuddle martyrs or the abolitionists?' 'Well, I do understand a degree of lawlessness is necessary for progress, however, I'm sure they didn't interfere with the rights of individuals. Many of these people set up their homes before peacewomen were invented!' We were pulling into the drive of a large, comfortable house by the main gate so there was no time to ask whether progress had not inconvenienced the lives of slave-owners or industrialists.

Mr Trier gave us all orange juice, sat us on the wisteria-hung patio and explained that 'things had been bad for them in the last two years.' 'Anybody who has the aim of only getting rid of the peace camp is perfectly commendable and all the lefties and queers and all the rest of them that think this (RAGE) has some sinister motive are wrong. I know absolutely nothing, of course, I've had absolutely nothing to do with it apart from sending money. It suits me, they have exactly the same aims as everyone else has got. . . once this lot have disappeared and the gypsies, I think everyone will quieten down; that's the aim, isn't it? I may be wrong?' Mr White nodded. 'I was telling Lynne how RAGE had really helped us get to know each other.' 'Oh yes, typical insular stuff, didn't even know the neighbours,' Mr Trier replied.

Driving back we passed a group of women chatting through the fence to a soldier. 'You see,' John White said, 'They're having fun — laughing! and then they say the soldiers attack them!' 'I enjoy the summer,' he continued, 'Why?' 'Well, there's a river behind the house and a lot of the students who come to the camp, come down the bathe, and some of them have quite attractive bodies.'

BACK AT THE Orange Gate, I stood in the sun trying to sort out the impressions of the afternoon — anything said often enough begins to take effect and I found myself looking for human excrement, dirty sanitary towels, broken glass amongst which we were supposed to live. None to be seen — only fresh green ferns, dog roses and newly burnt gorse. (The neatly-dug, earth-covered latrines were tucked in a clearing out of sight.) 'Three men visited last week, said they were supporters; we gave them tea — then when we weren't watching, they ran in here — we saw the flames go up and them running away. A woman slept 20 yards away.' Sally told me on another occasion recently a tennis ball and beer bottle filled with paraffin and wick attached were left lying in the gorse; with a pile of pornographic magazines. 'Of course, litter is a problem. The soldiers throw more litter than we do, we go round picking it up and the bailliffs make a mess every time they come round to evict.'

The trouble with RAGE's complaints is that they are very hard to pin down. While John Learoyd says the visitors are alright, it's the dossers at the camp that are the trouble, the Swaynes living by the Green Gate say the women have always been very pleasant — no rudeness, no aggression, it's the day trippers they attract that are the problem. And so it goes on. The stone throwing incident was two years ago. The women 'messing naked in a ditch' were at 'someone else's house'.

Moreover while many allegations are made *about* them, very few are made directly *to* them. And when they are they are dealt with. Mrs Morcombe, running the golf club directly

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The gas people–investing in tomorrow's world today

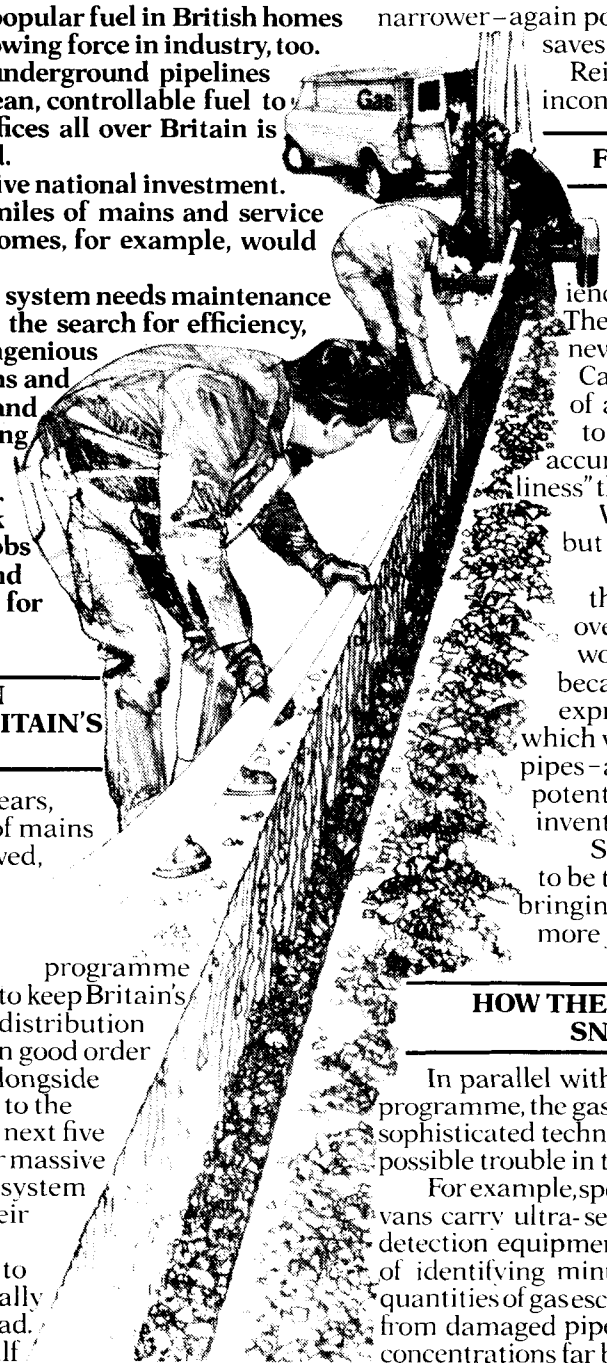
Gas is today's most popular fuel in British homes –and a powerful and growing force in industry, too.

But the system of underground pipelines needed to bring this clean, controllable fuel to homes, factories and offices all over Britain is largely taken for granted.

It represents a massive national investment. To replace the 150,000 miles of mains and service pipes into customers' homes, for example, would cost some £12 billion.

Naturally, the mains system needs maintenance –and the gas people, in the search for efficiency, have developed many ingenious ways of laying new mains and of minimising the cost and inconvenience of repairing and replacing existing pipes as the need arises.

This essential work provides thousands of jobs for British workers– and first-class opportunities for British firms.



£1,500 MILLION PROGRAMME FOR BRITAIN'S GAS MAINS

Over the last seven years, more than 20,000 miles of mains have been laid and renewed, at a total cost of over £1,500 million.

And the carefully phased programme to keep Britain's gas distribution system in good order continues, alongside further extensions to the distribution system. The next five years or so will see further massive investment in the mains system by the gas people on their customers' behalf.

As everybody knows, to repair a gas main you usually have to dig a hole in the road.

The gas people dug half a million trenches last year and moved 40 million tons of earth. Now, new technology has been devised to enable pipes to be laid or replaced without trenching –using mechanical moles or techniques for inserting new mains inside old ones.

Where trenches are inevitable, making them narrower–again possible with new technology–also saves expensive earth-moving.

Reinstatement is cheaper and faster, inconvenience to the public is reduced.

FEWER HOLES IN THE ROAD

Pinpointing pipes and other services underground has always been difficult–causing inconvenience, lost time, and higher costs. The gas people have developed a new instrument for this purpose. Called Gascopact, it makes use of advanced micro-electronics to provide much higher accuracy and greater "user friendliness" than anything known before.

We'll still be digging holes– but there will be fewer of them.

In fact, there will be fewer of them all over the world, because many overseas utilities have expressed interest in the device, which will, of course, detect other sorts of pipes–and cables, too. There is also export potential in other specialist equipment invented by the gas people.

So yesterday's investment turns out to be tomorrow's export opportunity– bringing more work for British industry, more jobs for British workers.

HOW THE GAS PEOPLE'S NEW VANS SNIFF OUT TROUBLE

In parallel with their far-reaching mains renewal programme, the gas people are using increasingly sophisticated technology for detecting early signs of possible trouble in the distribution system.

For example, special patrol vans carry ultra-sensitive detection equipment, capable of identifying minute quantities of gas escaping from damaged pipes–in concentrations far below the level at which they could be detected by smell.

All this work is designed to make the nation's gas system even safer as well as more efficient for the gas people's rapidly increasing number of customers– more than 250,000 extra last year, and almost 3 million more over the past decade or so.

Britain's got a wonderfuel future! Gas

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opposite the north side of the base, complained of noise to the police. The women at Indigo Gate wrote apologising and Mrs Morcombe replied saying it wasn't just them, it was the police and soldiers and while she couldn't sympathise with the cause, she 'wished them well and many peaceful nights'. 'I shouldn't say it really, but I take my hat off to them for what they've endured and what they're trying to do,' she said.

Further down the road both Louise with three small children and Barry, her neighbour, dismissed the complaints completely. Their gardens remain unsoiled and nuisance free. The women had warned Louise when her chimney was on fire. 'It's all baloney,' Barry said, 'they're never any trouble. Newbury is very parochial. It's never had any contact with this age group in large numbers.'

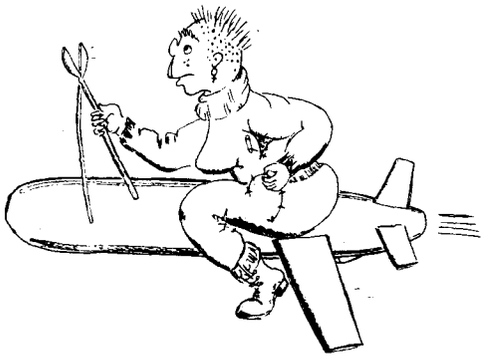
'Of course,' John Learoyd explained when I visited him in his shop, 'some people are afraid to speak up against the camp for fear of intimidation.' Plastered to his counter was another cartoon, this one depicting an elderly Quaker man in traditional dress pursuing a plump peacewoman, soldiers watching through binoculars, two topless peacewomen staring from a bender. 'Oh, come on,' says the caption, 'every Quaker likes his oats.'

Didn't he think the cartoons were offensive? 'The women are offensive not the cartoons, they're produced to be funny. People in the extremes of politics are over-sensitive and cease to see the funny side. That's the trouble with these ladies, they can't laugh at themselves. The *New Statesman*, he went on, 'has printed grossly distorted and offensive cartoons. The cover of the Christmas edition was in extremely bad taste. . . we draw our cartoons to make the peacewomen look ridiculous.' 'Ridiculous or unpleasant?' 'Oh, they're quite successful in doing that for themselves.'

John Learoyd is in fact impatient with the passive tolerance of Newbury people. If it were 'a little Yorkshire town with a bit more backbone and guts the peacewomen wouldn't be here anyway.' He refuses to serve them, he knew of other shops who did the same. He won't put up with any nonsense, and keeps a gun in case of an armed attack on the shop, 'because I'd rather be in court explaining why I acted in self-defence than attending my own funeral.'

I asked what his views were about vigilante activities? The maggots and blood, for instance. 'Personally, I had a bloody good laugh, we've watched intimidation and attacks on our forces of law and order and somebody comes along and says " 'ere, have a little bit of your own medicine" — poetic justice, I call it.' And what, I asked as I left, did he feel about those? I pointed to a row of girlie magazines — *Escort, Knave, Fiesta* — two topless women danced on the cover of one. 'As a newsagent I'm more or less obliged to sell some. I happily read them. They have some very interesting articles on cancer and heart disease. As to being pornographic, they're no more pornographic than *City Limits*.'

RAGE claims 3,000 supporters and the passive support of most of Newbury. There is no way of substantiating this. John White, the councillor, insists all his electors agree with him, but then goes on to say that 50 per cent



RAGE's local anti-Greenham advert

might be happy if the Council provided proper facilities as at Faslane. What is obvious from even a cursory reading of *Newbury Weekly News* is that RAGE have aroused a fair degree of public hostility. Basil Cooper, the highly respected head of St. Batholomew's School wrote pleading for decency, stating that 'the outpourings of RAGE supporters smacks of the Nazi attitude to Jews and are, to me, sickening. . . RAGE seems selfishly concerned with peace at all costs in our own back garden.' Tony Freke, chairman of the local Labour Party made a similar point. Denis Thair, Liberal councillor for Thatcham called them 'ridiculous and potentially dangerous'.

RAGE's response to such criticisms has been to turn on critics. Mr Cooper should not use his position as headmaster to write 'offensive and pejorative letters'. Obviously RAGE should, after the Greenham Squatters had departed 'turn our attention to the state of education in Newbury'. Mr Thair 'should not advertise that he is a Liberal councillor' while Mr Freke is reduced to 'pseudointellectual comrade Freke'.

'It's a pity if Newbury gets a reputation for intolerant selfishness' Mr Cooper told me. No, he wasn't a member of a peace group. 'I'm not abusing or defending anyone — it just seemed important that someone rather traditional should put a word in.'

'Anything illogical — and they are illogical — is worrying, particularly if it's allowed to grow unscrutinised,' said Trevor Brown, Liberal councillor on Berkshire County Council and member of the Police Authority. 'Why don't they discuss the expense of the police with their local representative on the police authority? I sent off a form saying I'd be glad to contribute to discussions — I've heard nothing since.' Trevor Brown sees the problems of Greenham as arising entirely from the failure of Whitehall to take part in any form of democratic discussion. 'So they've made mistake after mistake — £4 million because our police had to defend an indefensible fence.' Even Jack Gambling, Mayor of Newbury and a keen supporter of Women and Families for Defence, has his doubts, fearful that the intolerance would provoke confrontation.

Some of the criticism seems to have stuck. The offensive cartoons have been reduced to a logo, while ideas such as an 'illegal picket of the Home Office to give Mr. Brittan a taste of his own medicine, and the withdrawing of water rates' (scarcely appropriate tactics for an organisation intent on upholding the law) have been dropped. Advertisements now take the form of announcements about 'illegal' actions of the various authorities — Post Office, Water Board, Council, etc. — 'supporting' the camp. In fact, as the Water Board state themselves, they are obliged to provide a standpipe whether the encampment is legal or not, provided the bill is paid, and it is. Any resident has the right to vote, and the Post Office are obliged to satisfy all reasonable demands for the conveyance of letters.

It's interesting also to note that the advertisements no longer ask for support, nor give a contact address, while Dr Gibson's name as Treasurer has not been seen on one since Oxford doctors put in an advertisement announcing their support of the Greenham women and dissociating themselves from him. 'They are on the defensive,' Denis Thair remarked.

Other questions remain unanswered: one being — Why should a group so committed to democracy need to work so secretively? 'People have commented we're not democratic enough,' Dr Gibson told me. He admitted they had never had an open meeting. 'We already knew from correspondence the sort of people likely to be interested,' and 'small committees are more effective.'

Another question is — Why, when all the supporters to whom I was introduced clearly did support current defence policy, were they so reluctant to have these views connected in any way with their support of RAGE? Mrs Betty Warr of Women and Families for Defence, opposed to the camp for its 'anti-establishment, anti-convention, anti-male and unpatriotic tendencies', in fact preferred not to belong to RAGE because it wouldn't make a political connection to support NATO.

There is a consistency here which one can at least understand. But when I suggested that people's political beliefs might affect their thinking on the camp, Alex Hutcheon for one became quite irate. 'You are not to connect them!' he told me. Yet the facts of the matter are that I could find no peace movement supporters in RAGE; that Alex Hutcheon and Dr Gibson are both members of the Freedom Association (known for its anti-CND stance) and Dr Gibson chairs its Berkshire Branch. Moreover, when Mrs Jan Michna wrote from Yorkshire to Dr Gibson asking for advice because she thought the Greenham women might transfer to Fylingdales, she was sent not just the RAGE material but a mass of leaflets from the Coalition for Peace through Security and the Freedom Association attacking CND. His covering letter, on RAGE headed paper stated:

> You will see that we have been involved in earlier campaigns before the present RAGE campaign. . . it is too early to measure our ultimate success but we are pleased to see that this Easter CND will not be mounting a demonstration on the scale of last December.

What frightens me about all this is not whether or not RAGE is or is not what it states, but the undoubtedly genuine ability of people to totally compartmentalise their lives and see only with selective vision. So while John White deplores the cost of the camp to the ratepayer, he feels quite unable to pass judgment on the cost to taxpayers of defence spending; while Mr Learoyd deplores 'nakedness', he sees no problem in selling soft porn from the top shelf in his shop, and because I wear acceptable clothes and my hair isn't punk, I cannot possibly, despite my own admission, be a peacewoman. □

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DIARY

'The history of the *Daily Mirror* is the history of out times'. The opening words of Maurice Edelman's account of the paper were written in 1966, when its circulation was at its peak. They are no less true now, but they carry an althogether more ominous implication. 'I want to put the pride back into Britain', Maxwell declares, as if the UK did not suffer from a surfeit of such national conceit. He has slapped FORWARD WITH BRITAIN on the paper's masthead, as its new slogan. The *Mirror's* historic cry was FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE, which for all its populist mateyism had at least an element of class combat. Although always anti-Tory, the *Mirror* has never been a left-wing paper. What matters, therefore, are not Maxwell's own views, but the extent to which he will impose them now he is proprietor. Will it remain possible for its journalists to find out their facts and publish what they uncover, even if this rides against editorial policy? The space to be different may be the most that can be hoped for, but it is something that must be fought for.

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David Owen's declaration that Britain needs Thatcher to win the miners' strike coincided with Maxwell promising to support what he calls a Labour Party of 'the sensible left' that will outbid Murdoch in patriotism. The Australian will doubtless beat the Czech, not least because he has the inestimable advantage of not living in the country. Either way, it seems that we will find Thatcherism everywhere, even if the Boss herself goes. So I was surprised that Tam Dalyell endorsed the new tycoon at the *Mirror*. Dalyell has known him for 20 years. He says that the journalists must tell Maxwell, 'You bloody well listen'. It is not a question of being rude, he added. But they must not allow themselves to be cowed. Then, provided they have the information, he feels they can gain their say. I'll believe it when I see it. Maxwell's proclamation that he would fire any editor who engaged in a vendetta without evidence to back it up seems an unveiled threat. Will Paul Foot's outstanding coverage of the miners' strike be regarded as 'sensible'? Would Joe Haines's impressive and distinguished editorials during the Falklands war be thought a vendetta, even though they beat the *Sun* in straight combat? Maxwell aims to shape the Labour party in his image. He takes the front page of the *Daily Mirror* on the first day that he owns it to say that the slogan FORWARD WITH BRITAIN, 'is *my* policy'. Only the naive failed to see his emphasis. Perhaps the first test will take place immediately, if the government does indeed put troops in to try to break to dock strike.

○

It's a rare occasion that I can impress my seven year old daughter. But recently, keeping her company during children's television, she turned to Channel 4 and a hilarious performance by Dr Smartypants, as he attempted to demonstrate the convenience of doors. 'I know him', I declared, proudly, 'I've *met* him! That's Mike Rosen'. Then she came home from school with a PTA circular. One Michael Rosen had been invited to a summer picnic (it rained) to read his poems. Could Dr Smartypants be the poet? He was, and is! The household became addicts overnight: *Chocolate Cake* a special favourite. He had parents and children entranced by his gig, the school hall crowded to the door. Alongside his Penguin volumes he has also published, privately, a book of political poems: *Bloody L.I.A.R.S.* Except for a very powerful one about a racial incident, 'Playground', these are not so effective as his poems for children. Perhaps this is because expressing a conception and making others feel it for themselves demands a more intense language than the vivid and relaxed way in which Rosen shares everyday experience with children and parents; and makes them laugh the laugh of recognition. But you should get *Bloody L.I.A.R.S* for yourself by sending £1.75 to 11 Meeson St, London E5.

○

Another demonstration of how it is not so easy to make political humour really witty and cutting has been the scripts of *Spitting Image.* So far these have failed to sustain the originality of Luck and Flaw's puppets. The latter, however, have initiated the first completely televisual satire. Everytime a member of the Cabinet appears on the news, I now see the Luck and Flaw version, while their rendition of the Royals is fabulous. You'd expect the programme to be with us for years, improved by better writing. Instead, whether or not it gets a second run is presently under review. Central Television stresses the costs involved. The decision will come, I am told, 'from the top'. Which top? The emphasis on technical criteria has the smell of English censorship about it: stealth. Given the dross that appears and the novelty and effectiveness of the puppets, any decision to cut *Spitting Image* will indeed be censorship. Soft soap about costs and viewing figures will just be a smokescreen, if I can mix metaphors: an unjust attempt to kill the programme without being seen to do so directly.

○

Last month I bought an Ace-Telecom memory phone from one of the excellent Argos catalogue shops. Its price had just been brought down to £60. It has 50 memories. But it does not work, the memories corrupt; and I'm going to try and take it back. The British Telecom's version, however, has the fantastic price of £250 for its equivalent machine. Today the telephone is one of the least effecient and more expensive gadgets around. An integrated one with reliable and built in answering tapes and memory numbers should be compact and cheap. And I've another gripe too — the 'last-number dialed' recall button. This is now quite a common feature. It allows you to repeat the last number dialed at the press of a button. Although this is useful if one has got an engaged tone, it also means that to use the facility one cannot make another call from the same machine. At the very least smart phones should have both 'last-number' and 'last-number-but-one' recall buttons. That way one can make a call and, if it is engaged, make another call and then go back to the first one. Of course, the fact that I should be writing like this at all reveals that my word box is still so backward that it does not do the dialing for me. Yet.

Islander

ROGER WODDIS

The Marvell of Margaret

'This government is not slipping on banana skins any more. It is tripping over full-grown melons.' — a junior minister.

What fruitful life is this I lead!
Crab-apples drop at dizzy speed,
The withered clusters of the vine
Are now producing poisoned wine,
The hoped-for plum and promised peach
Are all too rare and out of reach;
Stumbling on melons as I pass,
I always land up on my arse.

Meanwhile a growing pile of sins
That goes beyond banana skins
And badly messes up the news
Persists in sticking to my shoes.
But what is worse, transcending these,
Are colleagues blowing raspberries,
Annihilating all that's dear
To a sick thought in a sick year.

And now the tree that bears the fruit
Itself proves rotten at the root,
And seems to cheer the Cheltenham staff
Who mean to have the final laugh.
Whatever plants I keep or drop,
I fear my early autumn crop
Will be as cankered to the core
And just as putrid as before.

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Mondale's mainstream choice

Claudia Wright finds that Geraldine Ferraro is a very conventional politician

Associated Press

Mondale and his running mate on their way to the Democratic National Convention. Will they go further?

Washington

BY ALL the rules of American political arithmetic except one, former Vice President Mondale is closer to defeating President Reagan than appearances suggest. The exception is that no President in more than fifty years has lost a re-election campaign when starting out as many points ahead in the polls as Reagan is of Mondale.

But even that exception almost evaporates if the political calculus is adjusted to take account of the Vice Presidential candidate on the democratic ticket. This is now true of Representative Geraldine Ferraro, as it was for Senator Gary Hart. Whichever the choice — and it now lies with the Convention — a variety of polls show that the 10 to 19-point lead the President has recently enjoyed drops to 7 points — even less if the West is not counted. If the incumbent President and Vice President can do no better than a lead that barely reaches statistical significance at this stage of the campaign, then the White House is clearly in trouble.

That the choice of a Vice Presidential candidate — man or woman — can do so much to alter voter sentiment is itself unprecedented in American political history. It signals that notwithstanding the relative novelty of a female Vice Presidential candidate — relative because American socialist and communist parties have run with women on their tickets — lurking behind the reluctance of the electorate to elect a man who can't project himself in front of cameras, there is a considerable popular desire to remove a President who ceases to exist when the cameras are turned off. The least that can be said about Ferraro is that she may be the stimulus American voters require to calculate that the bad marks against Mondale are fewer than Reagan's.

Several other calculations suggest an even more optimistic picture for Democrats. No President has ever won re-election in a year when farmers feel so alarmed for the future. Since 1981 US farmers have cut their purchases of tractors and other farm equipment by almost 25 per cent. Farm foreclosures have been rising steadily and at present 53 million acres of cropland in the Midwest are flooded. In Iowa, one of the bankrupt, water-logged farm States, Mondale was convincingly ahead of Reagan until May. The flooding plus Ferraro can be expected to help him move ahead once more.

Pollsters close to Mondale have projected a campaign that will emphasise the uncertainty of the future if Reagan is re-elected. This is not exactly a new idea, but it is a piece of cant that strikes home. No President has ever won re-election when the mortgage interest rate has exceeded 14 per cent — the current average is 14.75 per cent and it will probably top 15 per cent by November. This is the strongest single indicator of what the future has in store for the youngest third of the electorate that, while calling itself independent, has so far supported Reagan. Most Americans now believe the domestic economic recovery has peaked and the future will be the same or worse. This is why retail sales, on which the White House has been preening itself, have been booming. Americans are stocking up on their videos before they lose their jobs or their buying power once more.

It is true that Reagan can claim to have reduced both the inflation and unemployment rates in a single term — an achievement not equalled since President Kennedy — and it is also plain that car-buying, the acid test of American self-gratification outside the bedroom, is stronger now than at any time since 1978. But the Reagan campaign's attempt to capitalise on this — for their slogan 'America is back' read 'You never had it so good' — may provide an opening for the Democrats. In the lives of the young, and women of older age and middle income, the inflation rate has less significance than the interest rate; the brief climax of automobile gratification is sure to be followed in November by financial hangover and remorse.

THERE IS another way of gauging the election result, and that is to project the State by State results where Reagan won by small margins in 1980, helped by the desertion of Democratic voters to the third-party candidacy of John Anderson. It is not widely appreciated just how damaging Anderson was to Carter in 1980, and how helpful his disappearance may be for Mondale this year. In 14 States altogether, the percentage of Anderson votes was equal to or larger than Reagan's winning margin. Reagan victories in those States — they included New York, Massachusetts, and Michigan — were worth 158 Electoral College votes. To win the Presidency State by State requires 270 votes. Though not all of the Anderson votes can be counted on by Mondale, they were disproportionately female and Jewish, constituencies which according to polls, are ready to vote for Mondale and Hart *or* Mondale and Ferraro.

The galvanizing effect of the Vice Presidential choice casts a new light on the two reputed revolutions of the Democratic Presidential campaign — the gender gap and the black turnout for the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

Feminist Barbara Ehrenreich argued here (*NS* 15 June) that the gender gap reflected the influence of poor, single, working women who have been bearing the brunt of Reagan Administration policy, and who are well to the left of the major women's organizations that have aligned themselves with Mondale. Others like Gloria Steinem have argued that the gender gap reflects longstanding female identification with 'out' groups, the less powerful and less prosperous in society.

Current electoral facts suggest a different interpretation of the gender gap and this is the one Mondale's advisors believe. In this view, the gender gap is less a movement of women swinging against Reagan, as of men swinging towards him. Men have swung right and Republican, while women have stayed put — in the mainstream, welfare-statist, Kennedy Democractic Party. As Ferraro acknowledged to the press, so long as Mondale did not alienate that constituency, he could retain it without a woman on the ticket. Ferraro won her way on to the ticket because Hart talked himself into oblivion, and Mondale's preferred alternatives (all men) declined to be chosen.

Ferraro is a nice example of the political rewards and limitations that come from staying put as a Democrat in a district that regularly votes for Republican Presidents. In common with the Hart campaign, she invests the traditional illusions of American life — of

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upward mobility by dint of hard work — with an apparent new truth.

FERRARO's voting record in the House of Representatives shows that she is among the most loyal party liners in the Democratic Party caucus. What this means is hardly covered by the term liberal or feminist as these terms are generally understood outside the United States. In her political record, calculation appears to have substituted for conviction — she supports whatever the Democratic Party can muster a majority of votes to endorse. This is not necessarily a failing in the present political circumstances. As a member of traditional pork-barrel committees like Budget and Public Works, she supports such sensible things as the protection of social security and pension rights for the elderly, the repair of urban highways, day care for the children of women who go out to work, the prevention of domestic violence and the prohibition of the trucking of radio-active wastes through big cities. These become liberal pro-woman positions only because so many male Democrats have bolted to endorse Republican policies that undo each of these things.

In her votes on foreign and defence issues, Ferraro's ideology becomes even foggier. *MS* magazine may celebrate her for not being 'a soft, hazy-headed Representative who talked only moral issues while their roads fell apart', but there is little evidence she is interested in moral issues at all, belying most of what has been claimed about the gender gap on military issues. If the male Democratic Party majority has voted in favour of sending US troops abroad, Ferraro has too. If the party has split, she has almost always gone with the larger faction. In American Catholic politics she belongs with the Cardinal Cushing generation, with the bishops who backed the Vietnam war, not with the bishops who drafted the 1983 pastoral letter on nuclear warfare.

In 1981 she voted *against* an amendment to cut funds for the development of the *MX* missile — she switched later in the year. The Democratic Party had split on the issue, and by one vote — 113 votes to 112 — the majority had moved against MX. Ferraro then moved with them. At the same time she voted in favour of the development of the F-18 and A-7K fighter aircraft, and did not vote at all when an amendment to stop the construction of a chemical munitions plant was considered. On most occasions she was on the side of the party leaders.

In this year's votes she has pursued the same course even when it produced striking inconsistencies — she voted against the Pershing missile but in favour of the Trident-II; she voted against US troop intervention in Central America but in favour of the same thing in Europe and the Middle East. On Arab-Israeli issues she has voted the straight pro-Israel ticket. In all these respects she is not a reflection of the gender gap as the women's movement has interpreted it, but a mirror of the views of the solid mainstream leadership of the male Democratic Party.

Insofar as the Democratic primary campaign produced an alternative to all of this, it was Jackson. Until the campaign ended, he had demonstrated two important political lessons for conventional white Democrats. The first was that Blacks could turn out to vote in the numbers that could be decisive in November; the second was that considerable support exists for what are in the present context 'leftist' positions on domestic and foreign policy. Jackson's primary vote was thus a potential brake on the swing to the Reagan Right which Mondale, Hart and Ferraro were all too ready to embrace. The trouble is that in his frustration Jackson's post-campaign moves have undercut the value of the lessons he had taught the Party.

Smoking a Cuban cigar with Fidel Castro at Havana airport as a group of marijuana peddlers, felons, and anti-Castro plotters files out of Cuban jails to liberation aboard his aircraft is not the kind of gesture by which Jackson could retain Black votes or gather fresh white ones. In a US election, Castro is the political equivalent of herpes. No one benefits from getting too close, not even Castro — Democrats who favour normalisation of relations with Cuba are forced to dissociate themselves. A similar thing has happened because of Jackson's clumsy handling of his pro-Israeli opponents. Instead of putting them on the defensive, as they were after his effective mission to Syria last December, Jackson made himself vulnerable to their continued criticisms of anti-semitism. As a result Mondale had to choose between Blacks of whom Jews approve and Blacks whom Blacks rally for. Jackson's misjudgment on foreign affairs has therefore ruled out the possibility that Mondale's team would campaign on a foreign policy that is a genuine alternative to Reagan's. □

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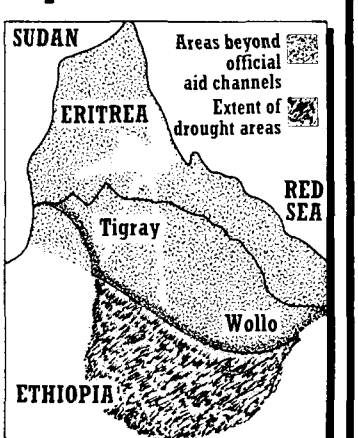

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DISARMAMENT

Democratically yours

Participants at the Third Conference on European Nuclear Disarmament taking place in Perugia, Italy this week have been sent an open letter expressing greetings and support from the Czechoslovak human rights group, Charter 77. The letter is signed by the three current Charter 77 spokespersons, and 13 other notable Charter 77 figures, including former Foreign Minister Jirí Hájek (top right), internationally-renowned playwright Václav Havel (bottom right), and Dr. Jaroslav Sabata (left), whose exchange with British historian E.P. Thompson was carried in the **New Statesman** *(1 July 1983 and 4 April 1984). This list of signatories, spanning the whole spectrum of political tendencies within the Charter, makes this letter its most representative statement on the peace issue to date. This is an edited version.*

EUROPE for the Europeans — the watchword of our Dutch friends holds out the prospect of a major breakthrough to a just and democratic peace. This perspective sums up most clearly what are our common interests and aims. What is becoming increasingly obvious is that our various strivings for national emancipation and all other emancipatory efforts in both parts of Europe can develop fruitfully only within the context of increasingly effective and motivated international solidarity.

Please appreciate, [however] that in our situation, anything reminiscent of ill-thought out, or even even ill-considered, strivings for peace 'at any price' is greeted here with justified repugnance. This is not solely due to recollections of well known historical events and a reaction to the appeasement positions of Munich, but also to the Czechoslovak events of '68 (which for some, were no more than 'a traffic accident on the road to detente'). There are still simple minded folk who, in the heat of the battle against NATO modernisation, seem to regard Charter 77 as some sort of war-mongering outfit. On that score we would merely say that in view of the geographical position of our state, such an attitude on our part would be tantamount to a highly developed suicidal tendency.

However, dialogue really is something other than an exchange of pleasantries. Therefore, permit us to continue our criticism of a certain tendency within the Western peace movement. We seek to do so in the most constructive manner possible. Our criticism relates to the fact that this movement is, after all, a part of the multitudinous world peace movement (it can hardly fail to be part of it), and as such it has something in common with the official peace movement in our part of Europe and thus with that section of the peace movement which is closely linked to the policies of the governments of the Warsaw Pact countries. One expression of this was the fact that the Prague World Peace Assembly, held shortly after your second Berlin Conference, was attended by representatives of certain of your organisations and groups.

We do not know what conclusions you drew. We are not competent to draw conclusions about Prague on your behalf but permit us to touch on what we see as most important in the polemic around Charter 77. It is not so much the fact that a West Berlin participant, in response to a delegate of the German Greens, stated that the so-called dissident issue was not a matter for the international peace movement, but something that had been injected into it artificially by anti-communists, as much as the fact that his words could still be greeted with a storm of applause. It would be absurd, of course, for us to blame you for the applause that was given to a harmful speech. We are aware that in certain influential circles in our part of Europe it has already been suggested that Edward Thompson, and END in general, are CIA stool pigeons.

It is nonetheless alarming that at such a diverse and broad forum as the Prague Peace Assembly openly anti-democratic speeches were applauded. We would be deceiving ourselves were we to seek consolation in the argument that it was an Assembly engineered along certain lines and that the anti-democratic speeches were applauded solely by the convinced partisans of undemocratic practices.

We believe, however, that representatives of the Western peace movement with quite liberal views also applauded, albeit perhaps reluctantly, or at least remained silent, sincerely taking the position that the question of political systems and political democracy and everything else relating directly and practically to them really do not belong in the peace movement since there is only one thing of vital interest to humanity and that is to stave off the nuclear war which threatens to break out between the different social and political systems.

We regard this tendency to be an unjustified concession to the conservative understanding of peaceful coexistence of two contradictory social systems and one harmful to the cause of peace. It is a concept, and the Polish crisis underlines this most eloquently, held by those who lack confidence in their own people and one which has become enmeshed in the idea that socialism can only be built buttressed by military force and police might. Such a concept of coexistence is crumbling before our very eyes. The talks in Vienna have dragged on for ten years already, the Geneva talks have been broken off and in Stockholm they are marking time.

This is no path by which the peace movement will achieve any of its long term objectives, neither a nuclear free Europe, nor a Europe free from the presence of foreign troops, nor the dissolution of the blocs, nor yet getting out of the blind alley created by the deployment of medium range nuclear missiles.

The only way out of the blind alley into which the policy of military might has driven Europe is to express principled opposition to this policy and to formulate instead a policy genuinely to unite all those opposed to the nuclear madness in a mighty democratic coalition expressing the authentic wishes of the inhabitants of Europe. Today's woeful situation would not be possible were the people of Europe not divided 'internally' both ideologically and politically. This internal division is the basis for the 'external' division of Europe.

Our view of the spiritual basis for a policy capable of achieving the broadest possible alliance of democratic and peace forces and hence of breaching the surviving Cold War structures and ideologies may be summed up as a desire to overcome this division and move towards a new internal unity, one inspired by democratic and moral strength (for example, the awareness that peace and democracy are indivisible, that it is naive to consider building peace on the ruins of civil liberties and democratic rights, that basic values of justice, freedom and human dignity are superior to a mere concern for biological survival). The hour of such a breakthrough will have come the moment we will be able to meet together in Prague around a table freely and without a police presence but with the participation of the official Czechoslovak side.

But if we are to achieve a democratic majority within the peace movement we must prepare ourselves much better than in the past. We are convinced that your own talks in Perugia will also make a notable contribution to this end. □

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LETTERS

All over bar the racism?

Ranjit Sondhi, Director, Asian Resource Centre; Ken Monro, Chair, Birmingham Unemployed Association; Alton Burnett, Secretary, Afro-Caribbean Resource Centre; Dean Huggins, Immigration Aid Unit (in personal capacity)

As black activists working in Birmingham, we are relieved that the issue of Raghib Ahsan's sacking from the Low Pay Unit (*NS* 22 June) has now almost been resolved in his favour. We hope that the West Midlands Low Pay Unit will take this incident to heart and become a more active and campaigning organisation.

We would also like to express our concern over statements by Ahsan's white colleagues (Letters 13 July) that they found him unco-operative, a lone and stubborn figure who sought to 'impose' his views. The truth is that Ahsan, like many other blacks, has had to fight to gain even a hearing for his views. The Low Pay Unit, like many other liberal groups, would do well to examine its own racism.

Democratic medicine

Margaret Sandra, London SE13

As one of Barbara Jacobs's patients at the Limes Grove Practice in 'distinctly untrendy SE13' I want to endorse her work. Her hard work and salary have sustained a marvellous experiment in popular health care. Unfortunately it is true that conflicts of power and responsibility have become irreconcilable with collective practice, a discovery which this collective is not the first to make.

While I support the major contribution the other workers have made in providing holistic health care, I have been alienated by the campaign to keep the practice which has been based on sustained personal attacks on Barbara Jacobs. Even your article (*NS* 22 June) implies that the solution would have been for Barbara to leave the practice she created, but this completely begs the question of finding doctors who would work in the collective. In particular, why David Kirby decided to leave and set up his own practice instead of staying to provide the permanent financial support the practice needed.

When all the dust is settled and Barbara can get the practice back on an even financial footing I know that her original aims will re-emerge, albeit on a legal footing. Until then I, and many others, will support this unpleasant but inevitable divorce.

Black Sections debate

J. Meldrum, London SW2

Your article on Black Sections (13 July) points out that black people tend to vote Labour but at the same time many black people are not registered to vote.

An Office of Population Censuses and Surveys study of inner London has shown that, of those eligible, 24 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans and 27 per cent of Asians are not registered. Clearly local Labour parties need a strategy to counter this under-registration. For a start parties could be pressing their local councils to remove the more blatant racism inherent in the way the registers are compiled. Black people could be employed to call on households to explain and ascertain who has the right to vote. Councils could publicise detailed information, in appropriate languages, so there is no doubt as to who is entitled to vote. Local parties could supplement this work by organising a doorstep canvass in November to check that their potential voters are included on the registers before their publication in February.

More generally there seems to be no evidence of a national campaign by the Labour Party aimed at under-registered groups (which in London includes 34 per cent of the unemployed). Besides answering the Tory claim to a 'mandate from the people' such a campaign would lead to gains in key urban marginals.

David Beere, London NW9

Recent discussion on the possibility of Black Sections in the Labour Party is in danger of turning into one where, for the best of reasons, people adopt positions that do the Party no good and do anything other than encourage black people to join the Labour Party and play an active part in its journey back to power.

It is surely a genuine dilemma that whereas some black members believe that there should be Black Sections, others are understandably worried about the desirability and practicality of a membership section based upon colour. After all it is easy enough to define who should be eligible for membership of a Women's Section or the Young Socialists. It would not be so easy in the case of Black Sections.

There is however one way in which a special role for Black members in the party could be respected without a great deal of trouble and which should be acceptable to all concerned. That is for the party to allow, and encourage, affiliations from 'Black' Socialist Societies. What is more the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) is currently considering the whole question of affiliations from Socialist Societies.

The 11 Socialist Societies currently affiliated have, I believe, submitted a series of proposals to the NEC that would allow further affiliations. The proposals are sensible, containing safeguards such as minimum membership numbers and so on. It would be up to the Black Socialist Society itself to decide the criteria for membership. A Black Socialist Society would be able to affiliate at constituency level in exactly the same was as existing Socialist Societies. Representation at constituency level could therefore reflect the racial balance within a constituency.

Feeling worse

Mary Livingstone, Portsmouth

James Lefanu's article on 13 July about womb removals is welcome as it advocates caution. Two years ago, at the age of 39, I had a hysterectomy. That operation was a life-saver and I'm obviously grateful for my present good health.

After watching *Feeling Better* (Channel 4, 13 July) on the subject of hysterectomies, however, I became increasingly saddened at the implication that this was a totally successful procedure. In an age of awakening female sexuality it is strange that no mention is made of a great loss, i.e. uterine orgasm. Gone is the anticipatory 'belly ache' and, frustratingly, no climax. Sex is still pleasurable but clitoral orgasms do not compensate for that wonderful sense of unity and total release of worldly tensions.

Surely this is a fact that ought to be considered by those for whom surgery is not totally necessary?

Sisterspeak

Marion Glastonbury and Christine Shuttleworth, Top Flat, 61 Alma Road, Clifton, Bristol 8

We are preparing an illustrated anthology of quotations about women. Granted the impossibility of doing justice to the neglected wit and wisdom of half the human race, we hope nonetheless to compile a wide-ranging, thematic selection of memorable statements, mostly but not exclusively by women, which will indicate the diversity of female experience, further the aims of the Women's Movement, and prove useful to the general reader in many ways.

We should welcome any assistance that our friends can offer us, either by proposing specific items or by directing us to fruitful sources in any field, language or period. In addition to prose and verse of which the author can be identified, we plan to include elements of the oral tradition: proverbs, jokes, anecdotes and folklore. Please send comments and suggestions to the address above.

Manifestly qualified

Simon Hughes MP, Liberal local government spokesperson

Peter Kellner is misleading his readers when he says without qualification (*NS* 6 July) that the abolition of the GLC and the six Metropolitan Counties 'formed part of the Liberal/SDP manifesto'.

True, we said that our proposals for decentralising local government (and I quote) 'would inevitably involve the *eventual* abolition of the Metropolitan Counties and the GLC', but we clearly said that this would only be done 'against the background of our proposals for the development of regional government'. The regional assemblies which the Alliance believes are vital would have not only strategic powers similar to those of the present GLC and the Mets, but also responsibility for health, water and all other regional services which should be democratically accountable.

Unlike us, the Labour Party is far from being consistent on this issue. It said not a word in its manifesto in defence of the GLC or the Met Counties. Indeed it implied their abolition — and with nothing to replace them. It said — and if anything betrays lack of resolution or principle it is this — *'we are examining* how best to reform local government. *We aim* to end, *if we can,* the present confusing division of services between two tiers of authority. Unitary *district* authorities, in England and Wales, could be responsible for all of the functions in this area they could sensibly undertake'.

During the committee stage of the Interim Provisions Bill, Alliance MPs worked for 30 hours continuously moving and defending amendments tabled by the Labour party, as well as our own, because Labour MPs had given up and gone home to bed. The Alliance forced a debate on third reading, and it was the Alliance who moved the amendment on second reading in the Lords. We shall continue to match our words with our action.

On these important questions of consistency and democracy it is important to get the record straight.

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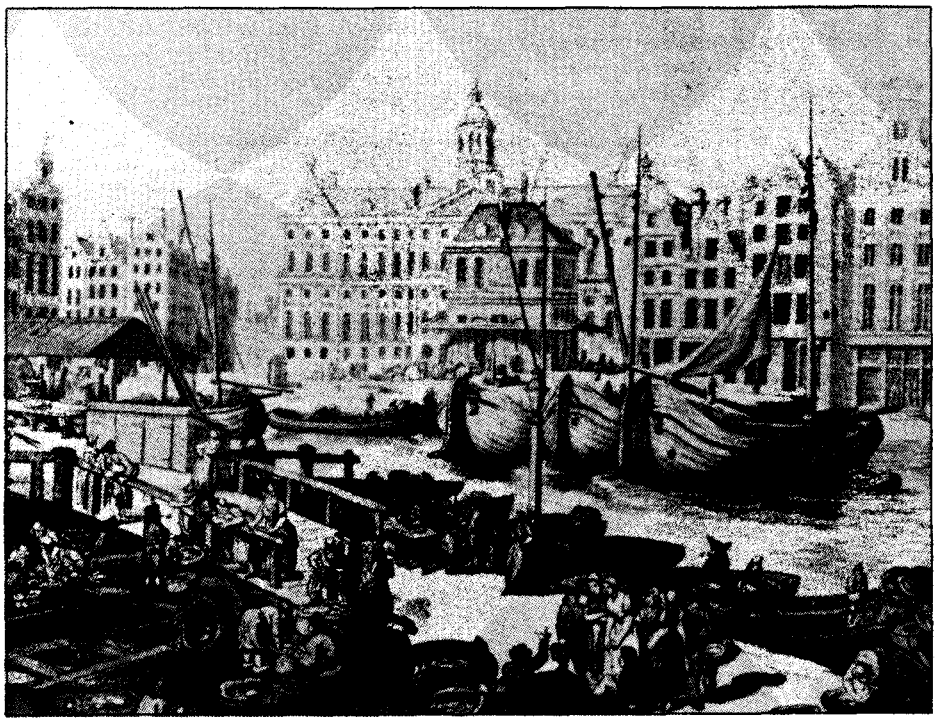
Christopher Hill

The grand sweep



Amsterdam, a 'hub of world trade', as seen by engravers in 1797

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FERNAND BRAUDEL trs. SIAN REYNOLDS
Collins £18.95

This massive book completes Braudel's trilogy on 'Civilization and Capitalism'. It is an extraordinary achievement, which will give historians matter for discussion for years to come. Braudel is a great historian in the sense that Louis XIV is *le grand monarque*. What he does is grand in manner and style, and he has changed the map of his subject. Not everybody will agree with all of what he is trying to do, but nobody can ignore it.

Braudel distinguishes a series of 'world economies', each with a city at its centre. In Europe Amsterdam succeeds Venice, after brief challenges by Genoa, Lisbon, Antwerp. London succeeds Amsterdam, then New York London. Each city, after being the hub of world trade, then becomes the centre of world finance. Braudel sees separate 'world economies', with shifting boundaries, in the Far East, the Islamic Middle East and Russia. Some of his most interesting speculations concern these economies which were left behind by Europe only in the 19th century. But Europe is his main theme, ending with world hegemony passing to the new world after Amsterdam and London had conquered the other world economies.

'Four successive secular cycles can be identified' in Europe, Braudel thinks. One ran from 1250 (or earlier) to 1507-10; the next from 1507-10 to 1733-43; the third from 1733-43 to 1896. In each cycle the movement is upwards until a crisis is reached (1350, 1650, 1817), after which a downward movement begins. Braudel does not attempt to give causes for those precisely-dated long-term movements, which 'are a rule in world history, a rule which has reached down the ages to us and will carry on operating'. 'Human history obeys all-commanding rhythms, which ordinary logic cannot explain.' Braudel admits the possibility 'that future historical studies will simply ignore the problems I am trying to formulate'. I think he is right here; but perhaps it was useful to try out such hypotheses, if only to reject them. One valuable insight is that in each cycle the material condition of the mass of the population is better in the downward than in the upward swing.

Nowhere is Braudel more grandly monarchical than in his attitude towards criticism. Some have complained that his broad sweeps ignore almost everything but the economic. Braudel responds obliquely:

> the state is back in fashion again, even among philosophers. Any analysis which does not now grant it an important place is placing itself outside a developing trend, one which has its excesses and simplifications of course, but which has at least the advantages of making some French historians think again and pay attention to something they were ready to dismiss, or at any rate reglect, in the past.

So he is responding not to criticism of his method but to a long-term secular trend. 'We must give the state its due then: the overall economy obliges us to restore it to its very considerable place.' 'Us', not 'me'.

Braudel still has not met what seems to some of his critics a major complaint — that he underestimates the role of politics in the consolidation of Amsterdam's hegemony and its replacement by London's. Similarly he recognises that protection was essential to the rise of capitalism in 19th-century Germany and the USA, but not that mercantilist policies for 17th-century Spain and Portugal, the Netherlands and England, necessitated war.

A problem which concerns Braudel throughout his book is Why Amsterdam? Why London? Why not Paris? France was a bigger country, more centrally placed, with a larger and (he doesn't actually say this) a nicer and more intelligent population. Nevertheless, 'the English frog managed to puff itself up to the size of the ox'. Yet 'France was without question the first modern nation, in political terms, to emerge in Europe'. (England is presumably not part of Europe for these purposes.) Three-quarters of Braudel's 100 pages on 'National Markets' are about France, though an interesting section on 'How England became an island' between 1453 and 1558 seems also to be describing how England became a nation.

In the Netherlands and England easily accessible water communications facilitated the early development of a national market. The Netherlands, lacking Britain's insular security, could not dispense with an army, though the navy — as for England — was far more important. In consequence the possibility of military absolutism never totally vanished in the Netherlands, as it did in England after 1688. (Was the unique stability of the pound sterling from 1561 to 1931, which amazes Braudel and which he cannot explain, due to this insular position? The two great crises of English currency, in the 1690s and during the Napoleonic wars, came at times when Britain seemed least impregnable.)

Braudel tries various explanations for France's failure but virtually ignores the obvious politico-social ones. Dutch world hegemony came in consequence of the 16th-century revolt against Spain. This revolt 'ruined the aristocracy' and consolidated the power of a burgher oligarchy. It created 'the real instrument of Dutch greatness' — 'a fleet the equivalent of all the other European fleets put together'. London succeeded after the 17th-century English Revolution had put power into the hands of men ready to challenge Dutch hegemony and had given them a fleet capable of beating the Dutch in three wars and of heading off the simultaneous French challenge. Hence the Dutch and English states developed very differently from the French. An absolute monarchy with a standing army and a permanent bureaucracy may intermittently favour trade and industry for its own military

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purposes; but it can control them. The looser, freer Dutch and English states permitted capitalist interests to dominate permanently. In these countries there was a religious freedom unknown in France — and that, Braudel observes, is essential to any centre of a world economy, from Venice onwards. The Netherlands and England welcomed the industrious French Huguenots whom Louis XIV drove out. The English aristocracy adapted itself to a commercial society as the French aristocracy never did.

Braudel post-dates and underestimates the English agricultural revolution. He rightly says it was due less to technical change than to new methods of land use, and he appreciates that capitalist farming depended on large holdings and security of investment; but he ignores the abolition of feudal tenures in 1646 which made these things possible. 'A new chapter in the world', as his compatriot Le Roy Ladurie put it, 'the decisive change in English history which made it different from that of the continent', said Professor Perkin, from which 'every other difference in English society stemmed'. Even in the 1690s, when harvests were at their worst, there were no famines in England as there were in France and Scotland.

It is not then 'the state' as such that matters. In the Netherlands and England merchants could use the state; not in France. Colbert's attempt to encourage trade and industry under government supervision was less successful than Dutch and English private enterprise. Even in the 18th century the French monarchy could not reorganise its finances on Dutch/English lines: a revolution was necessary in France, too, before this could be done. In the Netherlands and England the internal bureaucratic aspects of the state were (by French standards) minuscule; but its external power was adequate to commanding the sea routes of the world and so the trade of the world. English historians as different in outlook as Charles Wilson and Eric Hobsbawm see the connection between the overthrow of the *ancien régime* in England and the Industrial Revolution.

Braudel's neglect of political and social change may be connected with his definition of capitalism — one of the points on which he consciously distances himself from Marx. 'Capitalism has been potentially visible since the dawn of history' — in first-century India, in 9th-century China, in the Mediterranean in the 11th-13th centuries. It is not a social formation appearing at specific time in history. Similarly, 'imperialism and colonialism are as old as the world, and any reinforced form of domination secretes capitalism, as I have often repeated to convince the reader and to convince myself'. It sounds as though he has had his doubts. He might well, since he has deprived himself of a way of escape from economic determinism.

It is not for an Englishman to tax with insularity a historian who takes the world as his parish. Braudel's range of information is fantastic, his curiosity insatiable, his speculations endless. Naturally one agrees more with some of his ideas than with others, as was the case with Toynbee, whom in so many ways he recalls. Braudel has been and still is a powerful influence on historical writing. The book is beautifully translated, and there is something in it for everybody. □

HISTORY — 2
Christopher Hitchens

Only human?

The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam
BARBARA W. TUCHMAN *Michael Joseph* £14.95

Against stupidity, as we know, the gods themselves labour in vain. The study of history is replete with idiocy; not the idiocy of the simple-minded but the elaborate crassness of those who set out to deceive themselves. Santayana remarked somewhere that fanaticism consisted in redoubling your efforts when you had forgotten your aims, and the examples of Custer, Haig (Sir Douglas) and George III are known to every schoolboy. It's no coincidence that most of the famous citations of foolishness are military. Not only does war give immense latitude to the stupid and the blinkered, it also passes verdicts in rather a swift and summary manner.

Barbara Tuchman's new book considers epic folly from the standpoint of a contented American liberal. Having reviewed the question, why were the Trojans so gullible about that horse? Ms Tuchman surveys three other self-destructive episodes. She writes about the Renaissance secession; about the British and their brilliant provocation of pro-independence feeling among the American colonists; about the United States and its heroic attachment to illusions about Vietnam. These three evidently deserve their place in any anthology of the higher loopiness.

Ms Tuchman writes in rather a lofty manner, as if what she had to say was laughably obvious. Sometimes, indeed, it is. 'Folly's appearance is independent of era or locality; it is timeless and universal, although the habits and beliefs of a particular time and place determine the form it takes.' Well, yes, I think we can all agree about that. In less tautologous form, she instructs us that, 'Shorn of his tremendous curled peruke, high heels and ermine, the Sun King was a man subject to misjudgement, error and impulse — just like you and me.' No argument there either, though it would be equally true to say that His Majesty was fiasco-prone even when *not* shorn of his tremendous curled peruke and other garnishings. Ms Tuchman is the *doyenne* of the middle-brow American talk circuit and some of her archness and triteness in this role has been allowed to infect her prose.

The recurring failure of ruling classes to act in their own apparent best interests is, from a Marxist point of view, a worthwhile conundrum. Marx himself was very intrigued by the role of accident and by the blinding effects of ideology, and E. H. Carr in *What Is History?* made use of Montesquieu's famous dictum that, 'If a particular cause, like the accidental result of a battle, has ruined a state, there was a general cause which made the downfall of this state ensue from a single battle.'

As often as not, the crisis of a system is provoked by something which only a few people consider significant at the time. The Trojan case is too imbricated with divine interference to make a good paradigm, and you can't have Christianity without schism, so Ms Tuchman's first two examples are a little unsatisfying. But she can show without difficulty that the British crown was wilfully deaf on the question of taxation in the Americas and could probably have dissuaded Washington and his *confrères* from a step which, until the very last, they were most reluctant to take. She can 'prove' that one American President after another allowed himself to be deceived about the state of affairs in Vietnam, on several occasions, for instance, insisting that pessimistic reports be re-drafted for purposes of unity and consolation.

The explanation employed by American pop psychologists in such cases is that of 'cognitive dissonance'. Ms Tuchman writes of this diagnosis with some respect. Cognitive dissonance is the ability (she terms it the tendency) 'to suppress, gloss over, water down or "waffle" issues which would produce conflict or "psychological pain" within an organisation'. 'An unconscious alteration in the estimate of probabilities' is, in the jargon, the result. The average person, realising the capacity for self-sustaining illusion in his or her daily life, may begin to sympathise with rulers who practise the same trickery on themselves. Only human, after all, 'just like you and me'. That is just what is wrong with the theory, and with much of Ms Tuchman's narrative.

THE LITERATURE OF TODAY

reflects our anxieties and outlook. In his new novel *The Place of Dead Roads*, William Burroughs uses the mythology of the old west in a fast-moving narrative that starts and ends with a shoot-out in Boulder, but travels in time and space through his very unique imagination. His earlier *Port of Saints* (£4.95) and *Exterminator!* (£3.95) are both in paper. Two major new Beckett publications are his *Collected Poems 1930-1978* (£8.95) and *Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980* (£9.95). His latest novella, now in paper, *Worstward Ho* (£3.95). Also new: Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Recollections of the Golden Triangle* (paper £3.95), an imaginative exploration of a vampiric secret society by the pope of the *nouveau roman*.

Two important volumes of poetry are Pasolini's *Selected Poems*, revealing the film maker as a major poet, and *Gallows over Europe* by Andrejs Eglitis, Latvia's greatest poet, now in exile. A stimulating collection of new essays is *Goethe Revisited* (paper £5.95). Goethe's *Selected Poems* (£9.95) is a major addition to every library in superb new translations. THEATRE: *Best Friends* contains 3 fascinating new plays by Olwen Wymark, comedies of role-playing (£4.95). Ionesco's *Notes and Counternotes* (£4.95), his theatrical essays, again available. New ENO/ROH Opera Guides are *Manon, Butterfly, Turandot* & *Siegfried* (£3.00 each), magnificant, illustrated guides to the operas with complete librettos.

JOHN CALDER
18 Brewer Street London W1R 4AS

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American Presidents and other mighty figures are often rather tough-minded. They never seem to develop the illusion that they can abolish poverty and privilege, and nor do they fall prey to fantasies about universal justice. They are perfectly well aware of the self-interest of their backers and themselves. It is precisely by acting upon it that they create disaster and ruin. This could be because their interest does not reflect the general interest — a possibility that Ms Tuchman, with all her fondness for paradox, never canvasses.

America went into Vietnam with its eyes relatively open, and with the intention of supplanting a French colonial empire. As it happened, the Indochinese people had outgrown foreign rule by 1954 at the latest, and Vietnam was where — and how — the United States found this out. Here we see Montesquieu's relation between an accidental and a general cause, rather than Ms Tuchman's speculative stuff about Presidents trying to look good in front of their advisors. She's not wrong about the political shenanigans involved (in fact she summarises them very well) but she sees an irony in American conduct where none exists. Her conclusion — the very acme of spurious even-handedness — is that, 'Perhaps the greatest folly was Hanoi's — to fight so steadfastly for thirty years for a cause that became a brutal tyranny when it was won'. This is too fatuous for words. Either Hanoi Communism is brutal and tyrannical or it is not and, if it is, then it did not 'become' so in 1975. And how are the Vietnamese supposed to have duped themselves into resisting an alien partition and occupation? This is not even good journalism, let alone good history.

Ms Tuchman's book belongs several shelves below her earlier work on General Stilwell in China, and many shelves below Isaac Deutscher's *Ironies of History*. I'm impelled, finally, to one *ad hominem* reflection. If ever there was an example of a nation creating a disaster for itself, and screening out the discordant voices within, it is Israel under the new leadership of the Revisionist movement. Watching it is like viewing a film of which one has already seen the end. In the United States, where historians and moralists commingle as opinion-makers, this matter is debated almost daily. Among the loudest voices which damn all criticism of Israeli policy as made in bad faith is — but endings are the prerogative of historians with hindsight. □

THIS ENGLAND

£3 book tokens for entries printed. (On postcards, please.)

□Things have changed. The Duke of Westminster, Britain's richest aristocrat, now feels the *Times* is so dreadfully bad — what with bingo style games and one thing and another — that he likes it to be known that he 'wouldn't have the *Times* in ANY of my homes.' — *Daily Mirror* (George Moor)

□Scores of birdwatchers dashed to a nature reserve, when they heard that a rare night heron had flown in. But after seven hours keeping tabs on the European visitor, one bird lover decided to take a closer look and found it was stuffed. — *Daily Star* (George Moor)

□A spin-off from the miners' dispute is the daily appearance in the Gloucester area of Class 56s. Here at Churchdown North, Gloucester, 56007 heads north with a steel coil train on April 25. — *Railway Enthusiast Magazine*. (David Halliday).

FICTION
Angela McRobbie

Moving pictures

Orealla
ROY HEATH *Allison & Busby* £8.95
in the shadow of the wind
ANNE HEBERT *Dent* £8.95
Weddings and Funerals
AILEEN LA TOURETTE and SARA MAITLAND
Brilliance £7.95 & £3.50

It was Susan Sontag in her 1968 essay on Godard who suggested that from now on it was cinema which would be influencing the form and style of the modern novel. Strange then that we still expect it to work the other way round. This is increasingly inappropriate. Where once fiction and story-telling, fairy tales and comics, folklore and oral culture prevailed as the forms through which popular memory and private imaginations were created, it is cinema and television which now inform and shape the cultural experience of author and reader, artist and audience alike.

Of course this can give rise to the most awful literary opportunism, where the novel looks directly towards film and television rights. These are the books critics always seem to describe as having 'slenderly drawn but visually powerful narratives'.

Roy Heath's **Orealla** shows little deliberate strategy in this direction. The style is slow, languorous, understated and visually evocative, and the question it begs is rather that there is no tradition of commercial black film-making from which one could say it drew its energy. More's the pity.

The novel is set in 1930s Guyana but is not really locatable within the writing of Latin America. Heath is dealing instead, more starkly, with the relations which mark out the place of master and slave. These relations have, over the years, given rise to a particular psychology and it is this which is at the heart of *Orealla*.

In a setting where a system of semi-slavery and quasi-bondage is still free to flourish, Heath focuses on a black man of learning, of indefinite age and mysterious disposition. Ben is distanced, dispassionate and disparaging in his treatment of women. These, however, help him acquire an invulnerable front with which he can sustain the indignities and humiliations of his position in an overtly racist society. The narrative charts his movement between wife and mistress, master and Indian guru-figure, Carl, whom he takes in and supports. In Carl he finds a kind of psychological remove which props up his occasional lapses into weakness. Ben is eventually framed by his employer, jailed and then hung. He is neither likeable nor particularly admirable, but what *Orealla* as a whole shows are the states of mind which prevail under racism. And these range from madness, from being possessed, as is Ben's mistress, to simple but raging intransigence and passive resistance.

Anne Hébert is a French Canadian author living in Paris and writing for a wholly French readership. Her novel, whose English title is **in the shadow of the wind**, reflects both a North American and a French influence. In the case of the former the ambience is profoundly cinematic. Everything about the novel's style and setting conjures up images immediately resonant of film.

Griffin Creek, the setting,is a small Canadian town where, again in the mid-Thirties, violent emotions and twisted sexual desire bubble under the surface. Against a background of fanatic religious fervour and rigid moral living, all male eyes are turned, guiltily, towards two young girls, who are experiencing sexual growth differently. Fifteen-year-old Nora projects a vibrant, excited, sexuality, where Olivia channels it inwards so that it becomes all the more entrancing. The atmosphere is incestuous from the start. Everyone is somebody else's cousin. And the predatory sexuality of the frustrated vicar and his seemingly lunatic nephew come to the front when Stevens, whose own childhood was tainted by a brutal father, returns. His brooding discourse seemed to me psychopathic from the start so the murder of both girls in the end was quite inevitable.

The more recognisably French elements lie in the novel's poetic form. But that such effort should be invested in such a familiar and infuriating scenario detracts, in my view, from whatever achievement its language produces.

MODERN lesbian writing which also moves towards the poetic and the erotic invariably refers back, in mood at least, to Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* as an exemplary cinematic bringing together of both these forces. **Weddings and Funerals** is a collection of short stories penned by two writers, Aileen La Tourette and Sara Maitland. Their project is clearly lyrical rather than literal and they each use the real world of relationships between women as a stepping stone or more accurately a looking-glass which will transport them back into a world of re-written fairy tales and children's stories.

At points some of the references lose their delicacy (surely a vital feature of fantasy writing) by being over-wrought and too obviously re-fashioned. An ex-lover comes disguised as an aged hag to haunt her girlfriend's wedding. Instead of cursing the bride, as in *Sleeping Beauty*, she asks her to dance. More crudely perhaps the rosy cheeks of the *Snow White* bride become menstrual blood. Later twin-sister trapezists leap joyously to their deaths entwisted in each other's arms and in a more realistic mode two young-but-middle-aged women wonder how to greet each other the day after the night on which they first made love.

Wedding and Funerals balances precariously between the exciting but frightening world of lesbian romance and that of its own fantasised history. As a collection it is sometimes clumsy and sometimes fleetingly graceful. But it is a balance difficult to maintain. □

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Where Did the Forties Go? A Popular History

ANDREW DAVIES *Pluto* £3.95

The theme of David Hare's under-rated *Plenty* is the evaporation in the post-war period of the hopes of opportunity, achievement and fulfilment which the defeat of Nazism had promised. *Where Did the Forties Go?* has a similar mission; but, whereas the play concerns itself with individual disappointment, the book offers a brisk examination of the deflation of popular aspirations nationally and internationally.

Never was the time more ripe for the creation of a better, more equitable world. There was a tremendous thirst for knowledge, a keen interest in political and economic matters, and a genuine consensus about the need for adequate provision for all in the context of which the Beveridge Report seemed reticent rather than revolutionary. (Opinion polls registered 90% support for its immediate implementation.) The war had illustrated both the benefits of state intervention and the deficiencies of private enterprise.

What went wrong in Britain depends largely on your view of the post-war Labour government. Was it as good as it possibly could have been? Or as bad? Against the palpable achievements — the Health Service and India — can be set a range of failures: nuclear weapons, a nationalisation programme so botched that the issue has been an electoral albatross for the party ever since and the hopeless inability to capitalise on the spirit of the times.

All this, of course, did happen against the background of the Cold War, which handicapped all governments, however well-intentioned, by sending armaments spending through the ceiling.

It is all well-trodden ground. Davies's purpose in retreading it is to strip away the accumulated myths, those barnacles of time, to show how the people's prize was snatched away at the point of victory; to remind his readers that the social consciousness of the nation was hijacked by the forces of reaction; and to suggest ways in which the forward-looking spirit of those times can be rekindled.

In this latter aim, he is — perhaps inevitably — wildly optimistic. After all, expecting Arthur Scargill and David Steel to make common cause is straining credulity. But optimism is an admirable quality in these benighted times, and this is an admirable little book.

Bob Woffinden

Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction

REDMOND O'HANLON *Salamander* £17.50

Even though Leavis was good enough to include Conrad in his Great Tradition, it's hard not to feel that he is still more admired than read. Perhaps those who relish his adventurous narratives are made uneasy by his rich philosophical explorations, and vice versa. Conrad's letters make clear just how interested he was in scientific ideas, so it's certainly worth examining these influences on his fiction. He seems to have been more gripped by Darwinian and Lamarckian ideas, and by the disturbingly static assumptions of 19th-century physics, than by the relatively new revelations of psychoanalysis.

Readers familiar with Conrad's novels but less at home with Victorian intellectual history will get little help from Dr O'Hanlon, who after a few initially helpful pages, assumes thereafter that his reader shares his deep knowledge of the works of Darwin, Lamarck and Maudsley. Readers less scientifically literate than the author may on occasion get thoroughly tangled in the thickets of his dense, allusive sentences.

The works examined in greatest detail are *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*. Many regard honour and value as the themes of *Lord Jim*, though Naipaul interestingly sees the novel as the study of a 'radical straggler', a reading not unrelated to O'Hanlon's own. O'Hanlon identifies Jim's 'directing spirit of perdition' with the biological force of regression. Jim's voyage is a journey back into our evolutionary past, making, through fiction, the jumps that, according to Darwin, cannot occur in evolution. Darwin's observations are relentlessly linked to Conrad's characterisations. Jim's blushing is, O'Hanlon claims, observed by Conrad 'with minute Darwinian accuracy'. But why Darwinian? Time and again the intermeshing of what appear to be straightforward morsels of description with Darwinian theory or with speculations about biological time seems overstated. Suggestions, traces, possibilities are elaborated into analogues. The book's argument may be fundamentally sound, but its methodology is distinctly suspect.

Stephen Brook

Authors by Profession: Volume Two 1911-1981

VICTOR BONHAM-CARTER *Bodley Head* £12.50

To write a history of authorship as if it were a trade or profession like any other may seem an odd enterprise. Writers are not like lawyers or printers; they do not take professional exams or serve fixed-term apprenticeships. Indeed over 80 per cent of writers do not even devote themselves to writing. Most of them follow semi-congenial middle-class professions: teaching, the civil service, even publishing, though the dedicated freelancers among them can turn to labouring, fishing, cooking and bull-fighting. The only full-time writing activity is journalism, where the majority of writers are hired hacks. But Victor Bonham-Carter, who has been a journalist, farmer, broadcaster, archivist, conservationist, publisher and administrator, would claim that writing is, quite simply, the pulse of a writer's life.

In the 20th century, with help from the Society of Authors and the Writers Guild, writers have won some notable victories: against censorship, a tight-fisted BBC, philistine libraries and deceitful publishers. But they remain little victories: a rearguard action against overwhelming odds. Bonham-Carter quotes from Richard Findlater's now famous studies of the earnings of writers. The latest survey (1982) shows authors earning roughly half the national average wage. 'The rewards of authorship in Britain', Findlater concludes, 'reflect. . .a form of social exploitation which, in any other occupation, would be recognised nationally as a national scandal.'

In the second half of his book Bonham-Carter explores 'writing for performance'. Here, surely, there are fat profits to be made? Not exactly: 'with very few exceptions, writing for the theatre remains a part-time job and a part-time source of income' — 'in contrast to a producer or other member of the BBC staff with an assured salary radio remains a part-time medium, even for the expert' — 'only a small minority of freelances writing for the screen can expect to sustain a successful output'.

So why bother? Bonham-Carter puts it down to a sense of vocation. I would add vanity and egotism. Whatever the reason, the beneficiaries of literary labour are publishers, TV and film companies, the BBC and newspaper proprietors. And, of course, their audiences, for whom this informative and anecdotal history should be required reading.

Nigel Cross

Into the Remote Places

IAN HIBELL *Robson Books* £8.95

As Ian Hibell pedals the length of Africa and the Americas and over from the Andes to the Amazon, one is reminded of Milton's observation that the mind is its own place. For, sensitive as Mr Hibell is to the remote places to which he is drawn, he is even more sensitive to his own discomforts. Physically his hardiness must be admired, but spiritually his is a tale which demonstrates that personality is the heaviest baggage of all.

However, if travel is not Mr Hibell's métier, writing, paradoxically, is. He has a keen eye for absurdity, a gift for piling disaster on disaster and then pulling out the rug for a comic flourish, which is tellingly employed. His disastrous attempts to pick up stores in the Sahara, his rescue at the point of death by a Bedouin child, his attempted murder by Sudanese villagers enraged at his supposed spying are very funny. Even when he turns bitter and uses his narrative to lash the backslidings of his various companions his exposure of idiocy is acute.

Because he does not go in for 'fine writing', Ian Hibell's descriptions of the wonders of nature are far more vivid than those of many another travel writer. The grandeur of the Andes, the saturation of the jungle, the infinite heat and brilliant stars of the Sahara and the cold wastes of Alaska loom over the reader. Yet these linger less in the memory than his relationship with Jean, his final companion. Despite his well-marked tendency to paranoia and the inevitable lovers' tiffs it creates, some of the pages sing the joys of standing on a mountain top with the beloved, of careering on your bike down thousands of feet of twisty hairpin bends to discover your girl giggling at the bottom.

Victoria Neumark

War, State and Society

ed. MARTIN SHAW *Macmillan* £20 & £6.95

This book, which reprints eight papers from a 1981 conference at Hull University's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, has no single focus, but E. P. Thompson's concept of 'exterminism', which raises the question of how far the arms race can be understood in rational terms, exercises several contributors. Social scientists are committed to rational analysis, yet many of them are here reflecting on their discipline's failure to offer any adequate account of militarism in the nuclear age. The first four essays all take issue with the sociological tradition (Marxist and non-Marxist), and if their tone falls uncertainly between academic specialism and general argument, it is still good to see the issues discussed in this broad perspective.

Most readers, however, will prefer the later essays, which are more directly political — and far better written. Dan Smith wittily anatomises the British defence establishment, stretched between Atlanticist compliance and post-imperial fantasy and bent on acquiring Trident at any social and economic cost. Ralph Miliband, sharing END's general position, stresses in particular the recurrent danger of US interventionism. In the volume's most substantial contribution, Michael Cox surveys European history since 1914, and challenges peace activists to envisage more clearly just what kind of Europe they wish to create 'beyond the Cold War'. In short, one may be wary of a certain condescension, but such a reaction is ungenerous. Social scientists, like the rest of us, can help in what Smith rightly calls 'the imperative of sustaining the disarmament movements', and these essays, beyond their theoretical interest, also fulfill that wider responsibility.

M. H. Ryle

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THEATRE
Naseem Khan

Out of step

The Boot Dance
EDGAR WHITE *Temba*
The Merchant of Venice
SHAKESPEARE *Chichester*
The Lucky Chance
APHRA BEHN *Royal Court*
The Hidden Grin
HIDDEN GRIN/RATIONAL PRODUCTIONS *ICA*

Alton Kumalo's pyrotechnic shin-slapping boot dance introduces a 'fascinating if flawed' play from Temba

There are loud predatory whoops and yells on the soundtrack, a bit like Romans cheering on the lions. Lazarus (Alton Kumalo), at the centre of all this sound, smiles obediently and goes into another section of his pyrotechnic shin-slapping routine, **The Boot Dance** of the play's title.

Like the awful Thirties marathon dance of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, the boot dance is a dance of exploitation. It was danced first by black South African miners, without any special name to it. But then commercial entrepreneurs observed its strength and vigour, and snapped it up for night-club entertainment. Lazarus, in Edgar White's new play, hopes as he leaves South Africa that the dance will be his passport to fame and fortune. Dance well, his old father counsels him, and the white people might 'forgive you your blackness'. But it doesn't quite work out like that. The mimed prologue has Lazarus smashing up the theatre at the end of his act; and the play proper begins with him in a mental hospital.

It is a slightly strange hospital. Run by an elderly world-weary doctor (Lionel Taylor) who tells Lazarus, 'Nine out of ten people are in the same situation — they call it life', it is staffed by an engagingly raffish West Indian guard, Gibbs (Jason Rose) who tries to touch Lazarus for betting money and get off with young half-white Janette (Amanda Symonds), a would-be patricide. Clearly White is saying something about the degree of difference between the mad and the apparently sane. If that were all, it would be a simple matter.

In fact, *The Boot Dance* is about a whole clutch of themes that jostle and elbow each other out of the way. At the times when they coalesce, White's play achieves a strength and vibrancy that is nothing short of thrilling. But all too often they simply brush shoulders and go their own way. There's madness and loneliness and political exploitation and colonialism in the Caribbean and the healing quality of trust and the nature of maturing. Take the triumphant end, for instance. Lazarus, you could fairly conclude, breaks free either because he accepts Dr Adder's cryptic advice that the boy must be killed to release the man or because he accepts Gibbs's derision of his father's advice (on apologising for blackness), or because of the 'woman strength' he begs from the vivid Janette, or because — as the script suggests but Alby James's direction does not follow up — he opens himself up to the regenerative spirits of his ancestors. It is like a film whose focus keeps shifting: it both intrigues and frustrates. In the meantime, there's a lot to catch the mind and the imagination: snatches of vivid writing, sensitive performances particularly from Lionel Taylor and Jason Rose, and a simple yet highly effective set by Sarah-Jane McClelland.

The Temba Theatre Company responsible for *The Boot Dance* has been told that its Arts Council grant is to be withdrawn. Started by Alton Kumalo in 1972, when the phrase 'black theatre' to most people meant only a smartly depressing night out, it provided a much needed focus for black writing. On the basis of this fascinating if flawed play, Temba is by no means a spent force.

Chichester may not be a spent force, but its new production of **The Merchant of Venice** needs a bit of life breathed into it. From the start it's hard to see what director Patrick Garland is trying to do. Here's Venice, a somewhat dingy, underlit place. Elements of the citizenry wander around the stage, mostly wearing rather nasty bird-like masks (like Guardi's carnival Venice). One goes up to a red awning, studies it, then rips it down to make a kind of sash. Why? It seems as actorish and unnecessary an act as the general tendency of the cast to enter with broad look-at-me gestures, to exit at — for no good reason — an urgent jog trot, or to break the verse at the end of the line rather than by the sense. The set itself (by Pamela Howard) gives no clues to intentions. Venice scenes occur before a high brick wall. Belmont has net curtains lowered (to indicate a seat of femininity?).

Changes of scene were indicated by a little fountain that trundled around independently, in appearance rather like a pet Dalek. Alec Guinness — back on stage after some six years — fortunately was acting in a different play. His Shylock brought a harsh vein of stiff-necked dignity to the Rialto. An obdurate man, he stands out for Old Testament justice. It is only in the little scene with Tubal that, talking to his fellow Jew rather than 'Christian fools with varnished faces', he allows the confused grief of an old man to show.

The directorial hand, so vague in *Merchant of Venice*, is well to the fore in **The Lucky Chance**, the first production by the Women's Playhouse Trust. It's not hard to see why this Restoration play by Aphra Behn, pioneering woman dramatist (also novelist and spy), should have proved attractive. There's a certain kind of justice in going back to the roots of women's theatre. And Mrs Behn's play about the repercussions of 'forced marriage', albeit set in farcical terms, has an independence of spirit that is fitting to present times.

Jules Wright's stylish production gives it the faintly absurd, bubbly gloss of light opera, a courtly mating dance in which by the end everyone has changed partners. The reluctant wives of Sir Cautious Fullbank and Sir Feeble Fainwould have been released to marry their original true loves, no longer ineligible. The silly ass due to marry Sir Feeble's daughter gets his come-uppance. There's a lot of whoopery in between (some of which — make-believe ghosts and the heartless gulling of an amorous landlady — don't, like Shakespeare's jokes, stand the test of time), but also some very nicely felt scenes. Unlike in Garrick's *Clandestine Marriage* on down the road, Mrs Behn's women tacitly unite, with humour, in the face of male tyranny. Ironic, though, that she gave the best parts to men. Alan Rickman's nervy Gayman

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and Jonathan Adams's monstrous Sir Feeble, a kind of lust on legs, stand out. Ilona Sekacz's infectious rock music and Jenny Tiramani's versatile set, neatly manipulated by members of cast, are both splendid.

You won't find such good humour — or much smiling at all — at **The Hidden Grin**, an expressionist statement by Rational Theatre about parent-child relationships. A bride and groom sit motionless on hard chairs at the edge of a white minimal room, while a home movie of seaside holidays flickers by overhead. When it is over they make their way slowly, gauchely, stylisedly, to the white bed. Copulation is short and violent resulting, instantly, in the lowering of two naked figures suspended upside down, as in birth, from the ceiling. There is no love lost between parents and offspring (or indeed between father and mother): fantasies of blood and murder form the substance of bedtime stories. And boy and girl (incestuously close) reciprocate with plans of how to slay their hated parents, the act being mimed before the twins' blandly smiling faces. When death however comes, it is not in fact at their hands.

This should be a gruesome evening but, although it has its macabre aspects, it is horrid rather than horrible. The violence lacked the elemental awfulness that marks, for instance, *The Spanish Tragedy* at the National. Partly this is because Hidden Grin's basic statement is a relatively slight one, partly because the execution is not so complex as in their earlier *Orders of Obedience*, and partly because an element of parody diminishes events. A half grin. □

TELEVISION
Hugo Williams

Longwise

A LONG-HAIRED man from the Men's Liberation Front appeared on television recently, shrieking that women were killing him. He went red in the face and yelled that men had to lead terrible lives while women had a cushy time. Men were dying years before women because of the stress they had to bear on their behalf. He had an excellent point. Deadlines and breadlines are still things more men than women have to deal with. Men are where the buck stops, the adrenalin pumps, the tissues crumble and the heart clogs as the job is completed against the clock and against the grain. Which is why most of the great men born around 1900 are now safely under the ground, leaving the coast clear to their womenfolk, some of whom now come forward to offer contrary testimony on **Women of Our Century** (BBC-2).

'The fact that men regard themselves as Lords of Creation is no proof that they are,' said Dora Russell, second wife of Bertie and a pioneer of the women's and peace movements in the days when they were separate issues. 'It should be women.' I agree completely.

Dora's life has been 'a quest for liberal values, social justice and world peace.' She was top of everything at Girton, where she met Russell, then a randy 46, but not much good at it by all accounts: 'On the sexual side he just wasn't there. I fell in love with him because he looked like the Mad Hatter.' Russell asked her to go to Russia with him, then went without her. Typically, she decided to go anyway and spent four weeks in a train full of Red Guards. By the time she arrived, Russell was back in England, horrified at the news, but impressed. Extra-marital dancing was in order of course, but Bertie couldn't take Dora having *two* children by someone else and ran off with the Swiss nanny.

Dora shows us round the Cornish house where she and Russell had lived. 'This is the famous bed,' she said, testing a sturdy-looking object. I thought she was going to say where Bertie and she or someone else had done such and such a thing, but it turned out to be only a pine bed designed by Wittgenstein, which explained its apparent bouncelessness. I thought Bel Mooney might have taken the opportunity to question Mrs Russell about her husband's crucial affair with Vivien Eliot, or his notorious bad breath, but the emphasis was on achievement here, more along the lines of an obituary than a conversation. If only Dora Russell was right when she said 'Every woman naturally thinks it's sheer insanity to make nuclear arms' then all our troubles would be over: we'd vote Tory and die having sex in our pine beds.

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Another staunch socialist-feminist, with 80 books to her name (some currently reprinting with Virago), is Naomi Mitchison, who appeared in the witness box the following week. Mitchison is another of these dauntingly healthy specimens, possessed of brains, background and a dominant chin-line. At 86 she took the programme on a lurching night-fishing lark in her own trawler. She stopped driving her tractor at 80: 'You either hit it with a hammer or you put a hairpin into it.' Interviewer Leonie Caldecott's response to this writerly precision was a symptomatic and unanswerable 'But do you yourself miss the ritual of the seasons?' Time and again it was up to Mitchison to drag the interview back into the air. When she described her experience as a nurse in the first war, fainting at her first bad bandage and looking after her husband who'd been nearly killed in France, she was asked 'And did the pain of this experience feed into your early writing?' which these things do tend to do.

When Caldecott asked, 'Your writing seems to show great concentration and effort; how did you achieve this?', you felt the answer wasn't what she had in mind: 'I did practically no cooking, domestics were extremely cheap in those days.' Mitchison recalled the African boy she had befriended in London. She had later been accepted into his tribe, which had brought obligations: 'Now they're having a drought, the run-up to famine. . .' I could hardly believe my ears when she was asked whether she thought she had managed to establish herself as a latterday matriarch.

Joanna Lumley is supposed to be intelligent, so I expected a different standard of interview from her for her great peer Flora Robson, third in the series. In the event it rarely rose above the level of 'your most embarrassing moment'. Are they tight on film or are these shows supposed to double as obituaries? The only time the programme loosened up was in its various comments on Dame Flora's homeliness, which 'disproved the theory that women film stars have to be glamorous'. Had she ever wished to be beautiful Lumley lumbered. Coming from the more-than-adequate looking Avenger, this had me squirming slightly, but she was right to ask. 'O Lord yes, but I lasted longer than the beauties. Looks don't last much beyond 30, do they?' Miss Lumley, 36, could hardly disagree. 'You never got married,' she said, half informing us, half questioning her subject in the prescribed fashion. But even plain girls have some pride: 'I was one of four million superfluous women after the first war, so I said: all right, I'll marry my profession. . . Tyrone Guthrie wanted to marry me, but he didn't want to have children.'

After RADA and a burst at Oxford Rep, Robson surrendered to the pretties for four years, becoming a liaison officer at the Shredded Wheat factory, where she seems to have been perfectly content. Fame came at Lilian Baylis's Old Vic, but Robson recalled that her tolerant reading of Lady Macbeth had upset the critics' preconceived notions about the play. 'When I did the ghost scene in New York they clapped for five minutes. I played it asleep, you see, sleep-walking, not looking at it, like this. . .''Out, out. . .'' ' It was Dame Flora's last interview, her last performance. She died soon after this spirited, sprightly-wigged response to a somewhat stilted questionnaire. □

ART
John Spurling

Taking it hard

The Hard-Won Image
Tate
Artists for the 1990s
Paton Gallery, Langley Court, London WC2
Christo
Juda Rowan Gallery, 11 Tottenham Mews, London W1

Richard Morphet is defensive about the title of his exhibition as about much else, but the title is one of the best things to do with it. This is a mixed show of 46 British figurative artists, average age 60, many of whose best years were spent grinding away at their traditional skills and subjects in the shadow of critical and museum disfavour during the heyday of abstraction. In fact many of the same artists were rescued from obscurity — or at least from unfashionableness — eight years ago, in an Arts Council show at the Hayward, chosen by R.B. Kitaj and entitled *The Human Clay*.

Since then a lot has happened, including the discomfiture of abstraction and the return to favour of figuration. But the new figurative cowboys and -girls — neo-expressionists, neo-symbolists, neo-primitives, neo-neo-classicists — are of quite a different feather from Morphet's bunch. The new ones tend to be jokey, hasty, rash, brash, deliberately semi-skilled and cheerfully pig-ignorant, whereas these oldies take life and art very seriously indeed and I would guess that if they had to choose one avant-garde rather than another to be overshadowed by, they'd prefer abstraction. Some of them once edged towards abstraction themselves, others emerged from the parallel Pop movement and a few — Moore, Bacon, Freud — were already too grandly themselves to be put out by any passing trend, so that really those times were not too hopeless for them.

The Hard-Won Image suggests very succinctly what you can expect from this show: the painstaking observational and notational methods of Sir William Coldstream and his followers; the grim struggle with tubefuls of paint endured by Auerbach and Kossoff, in the wake of Bomberg; the deference to photography and commercial imagery and consequent withering of the imagination endemic to Pop-painters such as Hamilton, Hockney and Blake; the academicism of Patrick Symons, John Wonnacott and Richard Eurich; the fussiness of Leonard McComb; the fuzziness of Adrian Stokes; the painful and painfully self-conscious distortions of Bacon and Freud. But the recalcitrance of the image is virtually all they have in common and the show as a whole is as jumpy and indigestible to the eye as one of those interiors furnished by a mean landlord with assorted strips of left-over wall-paper and carpet; or as an RA Summer Show, for that matter.

The best artists here are loners, as no doubt all the best artists are, but if the title and Morphet's general defensiveness imply that they are hard done by in the rat-race of the art-world, that is nonsense. Moore is in the first room, Michael Andrews in the third, Moynihan's self-portrait in the eighth, Kitaj's riddling narratives and Maggie Hambling's portrait of Max Wall in the ninth, Jeffery Camp's vertiginous outdoor eroticism in the tenth: all good stuff, but all by well-known and much-exhibited artists. The surprises are few and fairly mild: Stephen McKenna's tree-scapes, Colin Self's emotive charcoal drawings of agricultural landscape in Norfolk, the backs of houses in Spitalfields by Anthony Eyton. It's not a bad mixed exhibition, or only half bad, but it makes too much of itself as an entity.

In an attempt to rival the Booker Prize for fiction, the Patrons of New Art at the Tate have instituted a 'Turner Prize' of £10,000, 'to be awarded to the person who, in the opinion of the New Art Jury, has made the greatest contribution to art in Britain in the previous twelve months'. A difficult brief, you might think, but it doesn't seem to have hampered the jury. The short list announced last week consists of five — or six, depending on whether you count Gilbert and George as one or two artists — of the current favourite sons of the Tate. Only one of them — Howard Hodgkin — appears in Morphet's exhibition, so perhaps its embattled air derives more from the internal politics of the Tate than from outside reality. Let me assure him, if it's any comfort, that the list leaves this observer completely indifferent to the outcome. It's just as if a publisher had announced a prize and a short-list consisting solely of its own authors: a non-event.

The Paton Gallery, meanwhile, is contributing to the silly season with one of those colour supplement prediction games: who are likely to be significant artists in the 1990s? Ten of the more forward-looking gallery owners have each chosen one hopeful. Nigel Greenwood's candidate, Christopher LeBrun, is probably a safe bet since he's already favoured by the Tate; the Lisson Gallery's Julian Opie likewise, though I'd lay less on his staying power. As for the others, they'll surely be around in the Nineties, but not, I would think, any more significantly than now. The only one I'd back myself is Anne Berthoud's Robert Mason.

The Juda Rowan Gallery is showing various wrapped objects and drawings for wrapped places by **Christo**. The objects — dating back somewhat — look rather grubby and mummified — but the projects for places are wonderfully evocative even in drawings and photographs. Those pink islands dotted across a green bay in Florida like a giant's stepping-stones, that orange curtain across a Colorado valley, that white screen running across two Californian counties and dropping away into the Pacific are what every place needs to take a holiday from itself. The essence of them is their apparently impossible grandiosity, their elegance and their ephemerality: significance imposed on insignificance or, in the case of the wrapped public monuments, on a different sort of significance and the slate wiped clean a fortnight later. It was no doubt originally in response to all that hard-won imagery and hard-won abstraction that Christo decided to make a very hard job of temporarily losing some of the imagery that already existed. □

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FILMS
Barney Hoskyns

In effect

Supergirl (PG)
Warner West End and others
Laughterhouse (PG)
Classic, Oxford St; ABC, Fulham Rd; Gate, Bloomsbury
BMX Bandits (PG)
Odeon, Marble Arch
El Norte (15)
Electric Screen, Portobello Rd

When the huge steel letters of **Supergirl**'s credits start slamming into your eyes, a familiar sound powers them across the screen. Yes, it's the tinseltown Wagner-machine, that heady swirling which tells you vast cosmic forces are at work. A minute later, swooping out of the maelstrom, the legend 'Music composed, arranged, and conducted by Jerry Goldsmith' appears.

By now it's probably illegal to make one of these Special Effects epics *without* a score by Jerry Goldsmith. He is, of course, part of a wider orchestration, a key component in the package deal of Super-entertainment. Without his sensurround histrionics these films wouldn't be the same.

Everything in *Supergirl* is, like Goldsmith, in place, and everything belies that placing. Its plot is irrelevant; a traditional soup of stars either distracts us from it or prods it on. Simon Ward and Mia Farrow flash past in the grab-the-bucks-and-run cameos. Peters Cook and O'Toole scarcely bother to ham it up, so expediently marginal are their roles. Faye Dunnaway is an incompetent witch who attains the inevitable evil powers Supergirl must defeat; Brenda Vaccara is her carping sitcom-style assistant. Ninety-eight per cent of the dialogue between these people sounds like it's going through its second or third rehearsal.

As Clark Kent's kinswoman, first-timer Helen Slater is winsome and virtuous and not too awfully all-American. She makes up for her wide-eyed bewilderment at mortal madness by being approximately a hundred times more intelligent than us, and her sweet smile, which suggests she is the missing link between Olivia Newton-John and Jamie Lee Curtis, is the one pleasure to survive the film itself.

As is usual in Special Effects epics, *Supergirl*'s trick is balancing small-town tedium — Pinewood's Midvale, Illinois set — against the cosmic battle of good and evil (or of one kind of special effect and another kind of special effect). Looked at another way, the film is a battle between silence and Jerry Goldsmith. It is *not* a feminist *Superman*: the male specimens are either fops or dunks (dumb hunks) but the girls are fairly dumb, too.

There's more 'family fun' (groan) in the Australian kidzploitation flick **BMX Bandits**. BMXs are the souped-up bicycles you saw in *E.T.*, the 'bandits' a pubescent trio who tear along the beach complaining that they don't have their own BMX track. Two boys, Goose and P.J., hook up with pal Judy after she is sacked from her supermarket job (by a Yorkshireman). By mistake, they get entangled with a planned armed robbery, the villain of which piece is that stalwart Cockney thug Bryan Marshall. (Many of the bad people in this film are English.) His goons are part *Minder* hoods (one wears an Arthur Daley T-Shirt), part *Diva* new-wavers. In fact, the whole dreary escapade might be described as a cross between *Diva* and *Scooby-Doo* (without the dog, or the humour). The goons' ad-libbing and P.J.'s stilted one-liners merely intensify the tedium. The skies, on the other hand, are exceedingly blue.

Laughterhouse is a damp, depressing film with a misleading title. This possibly comes from lopping the 's' off slaughterhouse, since it is to one of those that Norfolk farmer Ben Singleton (Ian Holm) is driving his large flock of geese. Ben's workers are striking, leaving him with no means of shifting the feathered ones to Smithfield in time for Christmas. His solution, bitterly opposed by a heavy-eyed, Hampsteadesque wife (Penelope Wilton), is to *walk* them to Smithfield, as in olden days.

The long and slow procession which then winds through rain-soddened East Anglia is not terribly thrilling. When it reaches north Essex, a TV crew attaches itself and the Singletons become a regular feature of the evening news. Stephen Moore is underused as the smoothly sheepskinned producer.

Richard (*Ploughman's Lunch*) Eyre has attepted to turn this morose odyssey into a film about England, but all you see is sour squabbling between father, mother and 16-year-old daughter Emma, who plans to go to the Electric Ballroom when they reach London. They make up at the end, but I didn't feel they'd learnt very much besides the fact that it is possible to walk a bunch of geese to London.

The picture which looks important this week is Gregory Nava's two-and-a-half-hour **El Norte**, not a sequel to *The South* but the long physical and spiritual journey of a Guatemalan brother and sister to the North, to Los Angeles. It looks important but isn't. Striving to be simple, it is merely obvious.

The siblings' story is composed into three sections. The first sees their militant father beheaded and their mother taken away, both by the kind of death squads for which Guatemala is and was notorious. The second is their flight through Mexico, arrival in Tijuana, 'shit-hole of the universe', and passage into the US through an underground sewer. The final section shows us their adaptation to America via exploitation and an acquired taste for consumer durables.

Although *El Norte* is an independent production which took two years to find backing, and is about an important subject, Nava's approach of letting the characters 'be themselves' (though this is hardly docudrama realism) begs the question: are they interesting enough in themselves? To which the answer is no. *El Norte* plods forward with a relentless predictability. If it is about anything, it is about the dignity of the Mayan countenance, the beauty of the girl (Zaide Silvia Gutierrez) as she sings, beside her father's grave, 'We do not come here to live but to sleep, to dream'. It gives no new shape to life, for you are not looking through a very unusual eye. □

WEEKEND COMPETITION

No 2831 **Set by Snubbin**

Last time around, the double-barrelled names comp. produced such worthies as 'Hugh Wood-Woodger: the policeman' and 'Hugh Zapretti-Boyden: the budgerigar breeder'. More, please, by 3 August. Max. 10 goes each.

No 2828 **Set by E.O. Parrott**

Institutions as described by Dylan Thomas.

Report **By Maximilian Sneerwell**

Not so easy as you thought then? *He* didn't run the alliteration into the ground, punish the assonance beyond enduring, did he? No, certainly not. And as for rhythm — well, if you haven't got it that's very sad for you but no great fun for the comp. copy-tasters either. Hon. menshes (non-remunerative, of course) to John O'Byrne, Margaret Rogers, Peter Norman, G.W. Banks and N. J. Warburton and eight Newtons to the authors of the acceptable attempts printed below.

To begin at the beginning.

It is Breakfast Time in the great yawning everymorning programme-spawning Television Centre. Hush. They are barely awake, the dawn chorus of announcers, cock-a-doodle-doodling producers and vision-mixers still rubbing the wayne sleep from their eyes. . . Frank, reithed in smiles, swings down the corridors of power-cuts, and says ahoy polloi to a million corn-flaked and marmalading nuclear families, where freshly after-shave-lotioned husbands keep half an eye on current affairs on the box and the other one-and-a-half on navel affairs on page three of their spicy flavourite nudespaper.

STANLEY J. SHARPLESS

First Voice

To begin at the beginning:

It is Question Time in the House. The members are as mad as mayflies or mad as Maggy there in the unmuffled middle of order, order in the disorder of the mooing madhouse.

Listen. It is Thatcher throwing insults. It is Kinnock throwing them back, it is the honourable, all honourable members baying like dogs in a doghouse at dinner time.

Time passes. Listen. Time passes.

Come closer now.

Only you can hear his dream. Tony Benn, ex-Lord and Leveller Extraordinary.

Second Voice

never such noise as drowned the Tories in 1945 when the Electorate came biting out and nibbled Churchill down to his wishbone and the long drowned people found its voice. T. GRIFFITHS

It is dusk, daring-dark, over the dragon-dwarfing, wharf-faced pile, dusk on the duck-and-drake bobbing lake. It is expensively dusk in the rabbit-hutched apartments, credit-card-carapaced, close-carpeted, closed. It is cheaply, cheerfully dusk in. . . nowhere. Tills ring in the mighty-musicked halls, in the Axminster-aisled theatres, concrete for the City coffers under the coffered concrete ceilings. It is dusk on the *Telegraph*-toting tourists, the searchers for basement-buried lavatories, the lost; dusk on the clerks, conductors, clowns and chorus, caterers and concert-goers, ears a-twitch. The privately-eyed orchestras stir, tuning and tightening to the baton. . .Dusk, richly-scented with fresh-pressed notes (fives, tens, fifties), licks round the Barbican.

D. A. PRINCE

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FIRST PERSON

Alison Hennegan

Just an idea. . .

Cambridge, 20 July 1984

Ma'am,

Forgive my addressing you in this presumptuous and public manner. Emboldened, however, by the current (though doubtless short lived) love affair between the Left and the Lords, I feel moved, as a loyal subject (which, all appearances and glib assumptions notwithstanding, I am — the courage required to come out as a dyke to one's family and as a Christian to one's dykes is as nothing compared with the nerve needed to come out as a Monarchist, but needs must when the devil drives and drive She does), to suggest, humbly, one or two ways in which You and We might deal with Them and, in particular, *Her*.

That you have cause for dissatisfaction, Heaven knows: all those tasteless references to '*my* government', not to mention turning up for the weekly audience in clothes identical to your own (oh yes, word gets around). I realise that there are occasional compensations and grounds for the odd chuckle: all those Heads of State lined up for the cameras on the D-Day beaches and never a She in sight, for instance. And I'm sure you enjoyed as much as we did Mr Kinnock's pithy comparison between Her and the new £1 coin: 'unpopular, frayed round the edges and thinks it's a sovereign'. Yet mounting irritation must surely now outweigh such swiftly passing pleasures?

I realise Ma'am that, hitherto, you have had recourse to the Judicious Leak. I think we all know by now, for example, that you were *not* pleased by the impertinent interference in your Household affairs which sacked Commander Trestrail when your back was turned and that it gives you no pleasure to watch our very own nightly Pictures From Poland as police baton charges replace the legislation against secondary picketing which this government clamoured for and now, clearly, fears to use.

But, with respect Ma'am, Judicious Leaks are not enough. Even Mr Livingstone, whom, Ma'am, I think you would rather *like* (admittedly salamanders aren't a patch on corgies but they're infinitely superior to cat's paws and weasel words), has recently reminded us all that the monarchy is the one thing which lies between us and the re-run of *Evita* on which She's obviously set Her heart. The time has come for sterner measures. In short, the time has come to look with fresh eyes upon the Royal Prerogative and the powers it gives you.

I don't know if you have the list handy — conveniently pinned up over the electric kettle, perhaps, so you can glance at it when you make your mid-morning tea (just as the police constables in the Met have the Judges' Rules printed on the inside cover of their notebooks, as a friend and I discovered last week when we returned to his house and found a policeman had called in our absence — at least, we assume that's how his notebook came to be lying in the hall. Aren't your policemen *wonderful*?)

I digress. Forgive me. Anyway, just in case you're a little rusty on the RP, I've been brushing up on it myself over the past few days and I really do urge you to consider it. Preliminary sifting suggests eight particularly promising possibilities. You can:

1) Dismiss the government
2) Declare war
3) Dismiss the Civil Service
4) Give territory away to a foreign power
5) Make everyone a peer
6) Declare a State of Emergency
7) Pardon all offenders
8) Make every parish in the United Kingdom a university.

Some of these are, I suggest, less desirable than others. (1), for example, is merely crude while (2) smacks of hysteria and the blatantly diversionary tactics which She herself favours (*vide* The Falklands). I must admit that in your position I would find (4) deeply tempting: why not, for instance, offer Finchley and its MP to Argentina? Certainly an enjoyable, but ultimately, I fear, irresponsible move. As is (7). (6) is, in my humble opinion, unadventurously defeatist.

As an Academic (Failed) I do find (8) enormously appealing: irresistible if at the same time you were to reintroduce and extend the universities' right, so rashly repealed in 1948, to return their own Members of Parliament. But ultimately a frivolous move, alas.

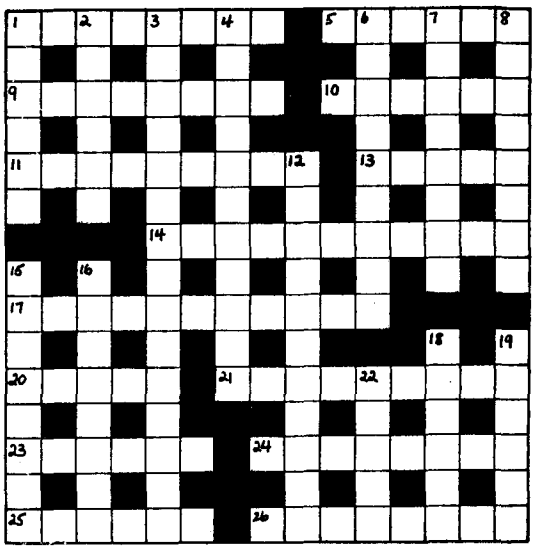
Which leaves, for most pressing consideration, (5) with a dash of (3). And frankly Ma'am, this one seems to me a winner. Everyone more or less equal — bar the Three Peers of the Blood Royal, Two Archbishops and Twenty-five Dukes who'll presumably remain that little bit more equal. Gender parity (well, almost — just a small female majority) at a stroke. Votes of conscience all round, all the time (a refreshing change). No more wrangles over proportional representation (such a blessing). And, most important of all, a perfectly constitutional solution to the problem of an increasingly disreputable Lower House. (The new Commons will consist, I suggest, of those Lords who so imprudently Disclaimed their peerages for life.)

I firmly believe that, in the present climate, this course offers the best available safeguard of parliamentary democracy. PLEASE THINK ABOUT IT.

I have, Ma'am, the honour to be your loyal, obedient (and hopeful) subject. □

Weekend Crossword 1447

PRIZES: £5 Book Tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1447, New Statesman, 14-16 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU, by first post 31 July.



ACROSS

1. Dogs quarrel during the service (8)
5. Place for employees (6)
9. The unit goes into shelter for a drink (8)
10. Ancient city in Asia rebuilt for animals (6)
11. Plants which provide a song with nicer ingredients (9)
13. Weapon which gives point to one's message (5)
14. They provide numbers of oriental attendants (6,5)
17. Change provided for tips is queer means of getting a little extra (11)
20. Follow about in action (5)
21. Fools are distributed all round Ireland, but this is one place (9)
23. Pass in which the MCC hit typical centuries (6)
24. Great man plays polo with Anne (8)
25. The sweet endlessly court Cooper (6)
26. Frankly religious outside the home (8)

DOWN

1. Spite of masculine woman (6)
2. Transaction in which my son and I are involved (6)
3. Not out and so taken to heart by the victors (5)
4. If less trade is distributed they are opposed to centralisation (11)
6. Where there are hidden nets and traps (9)
7. Leave cover on the water (8)
8. Carelessly making comrades turn up on the line (8)
12. Drink provided in the morning and possibly not sick before a party (11)
14. Child who could give us gory tunes (9)
15. Spikes which provide a means of gambling in resorts (8)
16. Preparation for performance is shortened when there is bad weather (8)
18. Best if turned up at home (6)
19. Christian's vessel for alms (6)
22. Eat off the land (5)

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EDINBURGH: FOREIGN (European) intellectual, attractive, 29, wishes to meet interesting young female for outings, friendship. Likes classical music, cultural *events, politics, conversation.* Box 8874.

GENT., TALL, friendly nature, slightly disenchanted, seeks lady who may respond warmly to gentleness and affection, for mutually rewarding, meaningful if unconventional relationship. Box 8837.

I AM a pretty, very intelligent, very introspective, intense, independent, exuberant, Jewish (N/O) woman, 43. I would like to be a traditional, loving wife, who makes a beautiful, serene and happy home for an emotionally literate, intellectual, ambitious Jewish man, 40-50ish. Box 8877.

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MALE, 40s, unattached, slim, tallish, educated, presentable, non-smoker, general cultural interests, seeks female lover of any age. Box 8862.

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MAN, 50; looks younger, active, attractive, seeks woman, similar but 10 years younger, sense of humour, for sharing interests (music, sport, country)/lasting relationship. London area. Box 8845.

MANCHESTER MAN, attractive, thinking, earthy, seeks an intelligent, open-minded woman, 20-40, to share experiences of both mind and body. Box 8873.

MELLOW FELLOW (60-70), sought by mature woman for caring friendship. Sense of fun and the ridiculous essential. Theatre, music, books, sports, travel. London area. Box 8861.

MUSICAL MALE *(chronological* 47, longitudinal 66, latitudinal 31), invites non-smoking, unaffected, uninfected, lonely London lass to share cultural leisures, human pleasures and (?) holiday abroad. Box 8848.

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UNIVERSITY LECTURER, 30, PhD, author, attractive, excellent background, Scotland based, Indian origin, needs a lady, purpose: serious relationship, marriage. Box 8872.

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WOMAN, LATE 40s, who travels hopefully, seeks intelligent, humorous, caring male fellow voyager to share good conversation, good food and good music on the way. NE England. Box 8884.

WOMAN, 35,
seeks kind man in Sheffield area, interested in cycling, literature, laughing, drinking and delicious food.
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